

The X -dossiers

Translator's notes:

First, I am not a professional translator. Flemish-Dutch is my mother tongue, but English slowly became my de facto mother tongue after I emigrated to the UK in 1994. I used DeepL Pro Dutch to English, then manually corrected the many AI mistranslations of the Flemish/Dutch expressions & colloquialisms. I tried to maintain the original flair and style of the text as much as possible while making it comprehensible for an English-speaking international audience.

I embarked on this translation project as my OWN initiative to keep the story of the Dutroux X-Dossier alive and make it available to an interested English-speaking audience. In my opinion, it is high time for humanity to wake up to the reality of systemic organised child abuse networks and the kind of individuals and purposes these serve. Lastly, I hope, in some way, this translation helps to commemorate the victims of ‘the network’. **I have informed the authors of the existence of this translation, but any interpretation or comments, criticism, feedback should be solely directed to me. You can contact me on my Telegram channel:**

<https://t.me/dutrouxxfiles> or email me on philipmer@googlemail.com

The reader will encounter the acronym “BOB” throughout this book. It stands for “Bijzondere Opsporings Brigade” or loosely translated: “special investigations brigade”; the Belgian equivalent of the UK’s Scotland Yard or the US FBI.

I had to take some liberties with the typesetting, font & sizes, and paragraph positioning compared to the original text to ensure that the page numbering of the Notes and the Index section at the back matched the original.

I retained the Flemish or French placenames, street names, and towns such as “Atrebatenstraat,” instead of “Atrebatess Street.”

A lot of the numbered Notes at the end of each chapter of this book refer to the police file numbers identifiable by the abbreviation "PV" ("proces verbaal") and a number. For instance, Chapter 5.6, page 394, PV 150.312. One can download this document via below link and look up additional details- such as the names of the individuals involved- by searching for the PV number in the leaked summary of the X Dossiers on Wikileaks:

https://wikileaks.org/wiki/Belgium:_Dutroux_dossier_summary,_1235_pages,_2005.

Another great site I recommend for further reference and research is: <https://isgp-studies.com/belgian-x-dossiers-of-the-dutroux-affair>

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THE X- DOSSIERS

What Belgium wasn't supposed to know about the Dutroux case.

Houtekiet / Fontein

We lost count of all the individuals who supported us in one way or another. We want to extend a special thank you to some, and we know from others that they prefer not to see their names here. Therefore, thank you, Andre, Anne, Anne-Marie, Ayfer, Bruno, Carine, Caspar, Christian, Christine, Claude, Daniel, Danny, Donatienne, the couple from Zellik, Eddy, *Elio*, Els, Erwin, Filip, *Flurk*, Frans, Frans, Gaby, Guendalina, Hadewych, Hans, Hilde, Jan, Jan, Jean-Luc, Jean-Philippe, Jose, Laurent, Lieve, Loretta, Luc, Marc, Marc, Marcel, Marco, Marie-Noelle, Michel, Michel, Mike, *Monique*, *Paella*, Patricia, Patrick, Paul, Pina, Pol, Raf, Regina, Rita, *Ruf*, Saskia, Serge, Tania, Theo, *Tintin*, Tiny, Veerle, *Vero*,

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Special thanks to Olivier Taymans, who was much more than a translator for this book and who actually deserves much more than this short sentence. Thanks also, especially to the people who took the time to talk to us.

For Tracy, Max and Juliette

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1. Winter 1995

*Jean- Paul
Raemaekers*

1. ‘I will set the machinery in motion.’

Jean-Paul Raemaekers, 27 January 1995

By the members of the jury's usual standards, craving passion and manslaughter, this case seems to have the hallmarks of a tedious spectacle. No one has been murdered, kidnapped or taken hostage. No one has ever even heard of the individual on trial. He has confessed to the charges against him. If anything sensational is to be expected, it will probably happen behind closed doors. On the morning of Monday, January 23, 1995, the Brussels jury tribunal participants resigned to days of technical/procedural debates on the accused's state of mind. The defence lawyers request their client to be sectioned in a mental institution. Equally predictable, prosecutor Raymond Loop appeals for a custodial sentence to serve as a deterrent-only 1 week after the start of the tribunal.

The defendant is 45-year-old Brussels resident Jean-Paul Raemaekers. He is to be held to account for the rape and torture of three children, respectively, eight, nine and ten years old. The physical evidence is indisputable, consisting of nine home movies providing a visceral account of these crimes. As Raemaekers had already been convicted of similar facts in 1989, the trial's outcome is a near-foregone conclusion. The offender's omens look even less favourable when, on the first day of the trial, his lawyer -the reputable defence lawyer Jean-Paul Dumont- is a no-show... He is replaced by his colleagues Marc Depaus and Patrick Gueuning. The defence seems resigned to the hopelessness of the situation.

The one person with a different perspective is Jean-Paul Raemaekers himself. He plays the role of a good-natured petit bourgeois whose one moment of weakness had destroyed his hitherto impeccable life. He turns up cleanly shaven and coiffed. Initially, he only speaks when he is asked to. When he does speak up, he does so with pathos, getting lost in lyrical observations and utterly ignoring the reason for his presence. Raemaekers talks at a furious pace and adopts a convincing, apologetic, somewhat submissive tone.

'I don't want to hide anything, and I intend to be truthful,' he declares in response to Chairperson Karin Gerard's first question. He describes his sexual orientation as 'a massive

problem'. Yes, he did watch those home movies, but initially, he couldn't quite believe it was him who laughed out loud as she cried out in pain whilst he penetrated the victim. He says he lost control of himself whenever something like that happened. 'To compensate for my condition, I always tried to do the right thing,' he states, positioning himself as a victim. 'I often made anonymous donations to charitable foundations and orphanages.'*1

A few jury members were starting to nod off when Karin Gerard brought up the compulsory subject on the first day: his youth. It was a tragic story, as usual, with defendants of a jury trial. Raemaekers is not the name by which he came into the world. He was born on June 25 1949, the firstborn and, until then, the sole offspring of one Rose Wattiez from Etterbeek. This single mum left him after a year and a half to the Public Welfare services in Brussels. He learned his first words in an orphanage and was adopted by the Raemaekers-Doumont family in 1954. The head of the family, Armand Raemaekers, was a colonial having returned for a short stay in Belgium. The family took little Jean-Paul to the Belgian Congo until a forced emigration back to the homeland was triggered by Congolese independence. It is unclear what may have prompted the busy family to adopt a five-year-old child on their return. The family places its eleven-year-old adopted son in a boarding school in Belgium. Jean-Paul Raemaekers stayed there until he was expelled for having committed sexual acts with younger fellow pupils when he was seventeen. 'She sold me for forty thousand francs', the defendant shouts out when Judge Gerard utters the name Rose Wattiez. He did not get on very well with his biological father either. The indictment identifies François Deliens, bishop of the dissident Gallic-Catholic Church in Liège. This individual is married and has five children. According to Raemaekers, nine more illegitimate offspring, including himself, should be added. During the preliminary investigation, Rose Wattiez confirmed this: Deliens is the father. When the bishop was called as a witness a few days later, he denied this with great vehemence.

Raemaekers' resentment toward the bishop is easily surpassed by the depth of his loathing for his foster parents. 'There is the root cause,' he exclaimed. With that family, I received more beatings than food. I still suffer from the fact that I never experienced the love of a family. Because of what

happened there, I started harbouring feelings of resentment toward women. I am violent toward them.' However, the judge is not interested in discussing his feelings towards women; instead, he intends to focus on children. I don't want to cover up my problems,' Raemaekers yields. 'I intend to pursue the truth above all else.'

The chairperson retorted that his quest for the truth was not nearly so manifest during the preliminary investigation. The home movies, which represent the critical evidence for the public prosecution, date between August 1992 and March 1993. For two months, Raemaekers insisted that he was not involved in producing that content.

He initially claims that he only purchased the blank tapes, and the perpetrator must be an accidental lookalike. His daughters- eleven and nine years old at that time- are the ones to deliver the condemning statements during the police investigation. In still photographs of some recordings, they recognise their classmates Nancy P. and Nelly DV. Nancy, ten, and Nelly, eight, are half-sisters from a socially disadvantaged family whose mother met the charming Raemaekers at the school gate. He helped her and her partner to find rental accommodation, and they became good friends. Although they did not ask for it, Nelly and Nancy were occasionally allowed to stay with their friends at the Raemaekers' home. And then it happens. 'I would never have believed that of Jean-Paul,' says Nancy's father during his interrogation. Nelly provides the investigators with material evidence: the nightgown Raemaekers' ordered her to wear during the recording sessions. According to Nancy, they stayed overnight as many as twenty times; Nelly said it was a little over ten. The detectives quickly learn that Nelly is prone to dissociative identity disorder. She has repressed some of those horrific memories and displays fits of rage when someone tries to coax her into her recollections. On one element of the data, both children's testimonies agree: Raemaekers always acted alone. As soon as his wife left home, he had his camera ready. If the children resisted, they were beaten mercilessly, and Raemaekers threatened to take them to a place "where things would be much worse". Once, Nancy P. showed up home sporting a black eye. She told her mother that she had run into a door. Her mother didn't think much of it.

Another girl -Angélique DG- is recognised in one of the photos. She was nine when she twice stayed overnight with Raemaekers in late 1992. Her picture is a still image from a 14.5-second-long recording. Later during the week, the jurors watch the entire tape. Unlike Nancy and Nelly, Angélique had no idea what was about to happen at the start of the recording. After a few minutes, the initially good-humoured child is overcome with fear and screams for her mother. Raemaekers violates her sexually several times and forces her to perform fellatio on him. At the end of the torture session, he says, laughing loudly: 'Good, then we'll do the second part tomorrow.' The venue is easily identified on the tape. It is Raemaekers' apartment on Avenue Louise in Brussels.

- Why did you record those scenes?
- There was a lot of money to be made. You could also trade those cassettes.
- With whom?
- Within an extensive paedophilia network in Belgium, Holland and Germany. I was only a small operator.
- Who were the others?
- I do not wish to make any statements about that now.*2

The first witness to take the stand in the afternoon session is Brussels-based examining magistrate Damien Vandermeersch. He tells the court how he learned about the videotapes almost by coincidence in May 1993.

Vandermeersch's colleague Jean-Claude Van Espen issued an international arrest warrant against Raemaekers a few weeks earlier because he had made off with the millions entrusted to his bogus firm PEFI by gullible investors. He fled to the Netherlands with his wife, Régine Depeint. The Dutch Central Criminal Investigation Department managed to track him down in Rotterdam on Friday, May 21. Raemaekers was arrested in a hotel when he was about to take over a local sex shop, as his briefcase contents reveal, along with 2 million Belgian francs in cash. That same day, a search was conducted on his home, Dorpsweg 198 A in Rotterdam. A quantity of blanco identity cards stolen from Belgian and Dutch town halls is seized. Detectives also recovered administrative documents indicating that Raemaekers has become the owner of a

prostitution bar in the Rotterdam red light district. A Dutch detective notices the excessive number of pornographic magazines and videotapes in the house. They have been arranged and collated by the owner with the zeal of an avid stamp collector. The detective watches a video and then must sit down for a moment. The tapes show scenes in which mostly Asian and occasionally European children are raped by a sadist. The sadist's voice sounds familiar to Belgian investigators.

On May 24 1993, Raemaekers was extradited to Belgium. In addition to the PEFI investigation, a second Raemaekers dossier is opened at the Brussels Public Prosecutor's Office, with Vandermeersch at the helm of the investigation.*3 He immediately orders additional house searches. The most relevant find for the trial is discovered on June 10 at a second address of Raemaekers in Rotterdam. Another 125 videotapes and four old-fashioned rolls of film are found.

In his testimony, Vandermeersch does not mention the number of tapes found at Raemaekers' place. According to the indictment drawn by attorney-general Loop, only nine tapes can be used as evidence during the trial. It regards the limited number of tapes on which both victim and perpetrator are identifiable. 'This was a case in which we were fully aware that we only got to see the tip of the iceberg,' a Brussels BOB official later recalled. 'But even that small tip was of such a magnitude to be sufficient for a court of law. And yes, that's Belgium: pragmatic. Rather than allow a full investigation, they only continue the search until there is adequate evidence to obtain one life sentence. Back in Rotterdam, a total of four thousand videotapes were found. I remember this specifically because it was one of the reasons why we had to rent two trucks.'

The indictment describes the nine videotapes' contents: 'The scenario mainly was the same. He filmed a girl in a nightgown who was getting undressed. He then told the victim to lie down on the bed or the table. She was ordered to spread her legs and open her mouth.

Thereupon the man performed acts of vaginal and oral penetration until he ejaculated. The victims' fear and disgust was manifest. The perpetrator did not hold back from

threatening them. He filmed the entire spectacle of which he was simultaneously director and actor. He regularly interrupted his actions to adjust the camera's lens or change the field of vision.`*4

There is something strange about the relationship between Jean-Paul Raemaekers and his wife, Régine Depeint. As PEFI's delegate director, the international arrest mandate applied as much to her as to him. Even if it became soon evident during the trial that she, just as Raemaekers' two previous wives, had suffered from his outbursts of anger, Vandermeersch claimed she knew nothing of his paedophile tendencies. `The defendant was furious when he learned we had let his wife watch the videotapes. However, this was necessary to make progress in the investigation. He continues that the interrogation of Raemaekers was indeed anything but easy at first. He refused to make any statement at all. He behaved aggressively and defiantly.'

It was not until September 16, 1993, that Raemaekers was prepared to acknowledge the cassettes. He says the material they confiscated was only part of his collection. With his confessions come references to paedophilia networks, high-ranking clients and his own far less critical role in this enigmatic ensemble.

- But you found no evidence of any accomplices?
- On the tapes we could view, only he can be recognised.
- As a matter of fact, the footage shows that he alone was operating the camera.
- Were there no other adults involved?
- No. The defendant claimed during the interrogations that other adults had been involved on different occasions. He went on to state that he was in a difficult situation because he would have to name a politician and a senior army officer. He also told us that he had participated with these two gentlemen in sex parties at an address on Franklin Roosevelt Avenue in Brussels. He claims a magistrate, a lawyer, and several diplomats were also present.

Jean-Paul Raemaekers shifts back and forth restlessly on his bench. He appears concerned about everything said about him, but no one can tell from his grimace whether he is doing

this to support the accusations or the contrary. What the jurors have learned so far about the defendant is that by the end of the week, they will have to cast judgment on a repulsive creature. His rhetoric about high-ranking individuals perfectly fits the image of a miserable soul desperately searching for absolution.

'This was a shocking experience for the investigators', Vandermeersch stated. We became, as it were, eyewitnesses to a gruesome, sickening crime. Sometimes the camera focuses on the child's position opposing the rapist; other times, the victim's face is in full close-up. We could frequently hear the children enduring beatings to force them into sex acts. We heard him order them to stop crying on one of the tapes. He threatened to repeat the entire scene if the picture quality was not good enough.'

The scene in question, Vandermeersch explains, lasted precisely twenty minutes and seven seconds. Nancy P must perform fellatio on Raemaekers and swallow his sperm. Before it gets to that, he raises another complaint at her. It's her fault, he says, that the camera wasn't positioned correctly and that everything will have to be redone the next day. On the tape, the girl says "thank you" when told it has been enough for today. These children are scarred for life. During the preliminary investigation, I met the mother of one of the three girls. She said she felt like she had lost her child forever. I tried to speak to one of the children but was unsuccessful. It is remarkable, by the way, that these children never talked about the nightmare they experienced.'

On the second day of the trial, the experts take their places on the witness benches. In a joint report, the Brussels psychiatrists Crochelet and Delattre had already expressed their pessimism about Jean-Paul Raemaekers' chances of 'recovery' (from his paedophilia) on March 6 1994. 'The only thing that could persuade him to seek treatment is the fear of a penal sanction,' said Dr Delattre. Both psychiatrists consider Raemaekers fully responsible for his actions. It is Raemaekers himself who, with his unrelenting pleas for psychiatric internment, had inadvertently convinced them about the accuracy of their conclusion. He knows that this is the only way to resume his life as before within a few years - which seems to be his intention. 'Then again, he is no ordinary

paedophile,' Delattre insists. 'With him, sexual perversion is only one facet of a psychopathic behaviour that can take various forms. His behaviour is characterised by an, at times, hysterical urge to imagine himself in someone else's role, preferably a celebrity of some kind. He does this with such conviction that he starts to believe his lies. His whole life was characterised by an inward yearning for this other-self, for respect.' In their report, the psychiatrists ascribed some other striking characteristics to him: theatricality, mythomania, megalomania, paranoia, hysteria, narcissism, extreme impulsiveness, and absence of any form of fear. The Crochelet/Delattre report contains one sentence that, had it been noticed in time, could have saved the Belgian state tens of millions two years later in (an investigation in) Jumet. The phrase comes from a passage in which the doctors predict how Jean-Paul Raemaekers will handle prolonged imprisonment. There are two possibilities, they say. Either he will suffer a total psychological collapse, or 'he will invent a role for himself to adjust to the actual circumstances of the moment'.

The third psychiatrist to appear on the scene is Dr Berger from Brussels. He is the man who was supposed to accompany Raemaekers after his early parole in 1991. 'But nobody told me back then that I was dealing with a paedophile,' Berger testifies. 'And so now we know that during his therapy, he had already started the activities for which he is now on trial.' Unlike his two colleagues, Berger does believe in the beneficial effects of internment. Even the trial itself is an integral part of Raemakers' therapy, Berger claims. 'For a mythomaniac like him, there is no greater punishment imaginable than the ultimate confrontation with himself. That is what is happening here.'

On the third day of the trial, the three ex-wives come to testify. One by one, they paint a picture of an initially extraordinarily charming and attentive True Jacob but, over several months, morphing into an obsessive indoor tyrant. He hit his offspring hard and often, but never raped them," is about the only positive thing Régine Depeint can add to the portrait. Very

briefly, the trial takes a somewhat amusing turn when it was revealed that Raemaekers introduced himself to some as Alexandre de Saligny and others as Alexandre Hartway La Tour. He added his wife's name to his own at a third marriage. It then became Alexandre Jean-Paul Raemaekers de Peint. There is a link: Jean-Paul Raemaekers prefers to be called Alexandre.

It is the turn of the social counsellors to testify. They had visited Raemaekers in prison. 'He told me that he is just a small cog in a much larger network,' explains one of them. 'He says he has supplied little girls for sex parties at which powerful and important people were present. No, he never mentioned names. I remember that one day, he said: if I talk, this country will explode.'

Madame Françoise de Saligny follows the daily proceedings of the jury trial with great interest in the *Le Soir* newspaper. She is a cultural attaché at the Finnish Embassy in Brussels and enjoys certain fame in Paris with her essays on fine arts. Françoise de Saligny is no less proud of her lineage. Her father once mapped out the entire family tree of the de Saligny's and found that she, Françoise, was the last descendant of the lineage. In the summer of 1987, Françoise de Saligny was shown a copy of a French-language newspaper. A colleague asked her if this might be a relative of hers. She read with astonishment: 'Alexandre de Saligny is a writer. He claims to have achieved great fame in France. But it so happens that he was born in Brussels and still holds a powerful affection for Belgium. Having conquered Paris, he now wants fame in his own country. On the occasion of his twenty-second book publication, he plans his grand re-introduction to the Belgian public. That is why he gave a press conference yesterday at the Press House in Namur (...).*5

Madame de Saligny manages to get hold of a copy of the book in question: "Les anges se parlent" (The Angels Talk). She stumbles upon a series of silly rhymes about 'the rudiments of life'. There is a note embedded in the book. It says: 'Would you like to publish a book? I'll help you. Do you want to write a book? I'll write it for you.' Signed: Alexandre

de Saligny. Madame de Saligny starts to read. After two pages, her finger rests on the first grammatical error, then calls her lawyer, Alain Berenboom. A few days later, he calls her back: 'It is worse than you could have suspected.'

The so-called Alexandre de Saligny had already encountered the law on several occasions.*6 As soon as he got his hands on some money at his first job in an insurance office, he absconded with it. He was sentenced on May 8, 1979, to four years of incarceration for this crime.*7 In 1980, Raemaekers was convicted three times. The Bruges criminal court imposes a lifelong driving ban on him because of a fatal traffic accident. In Brussels, convictions ensue for attempted extortion (four months of jail time) and swindling (two months of jail time). During his first leave from prison in 1981, Raemaekers absconded to France. Five years later, new predicaments forced him to flee in the opposite direction.*8 At the end of the interview with his client, lawyer Berenboom had to reveal one more conviction: on June 5 1987, by the criminal court of Namur, again for fraud. How Raemaekers manages it is a mystery, but he walks around freely, even giving press conferences. He doesn't even use his false name to hide from justice. The back cover of the books he publishes displays his picture, and a brief biography -along with some fictitious literary awards- mentions his date of birth and his mother's maiden name.

In 1987, Jean-Paul Raemaekers moved into a townhouse in the Paul Dejaerlaan in Saint-Gilles. It is one of those neighbourhoods of beautiful, nineteenth-century houses where quite a few recently divorced forty-somethings settle down to salvage something meaningful from their lives. Raemaekers introduces himself to this milieu as a writer, impresario, philosopher and master chess player. Now and then, he lets slip to friends something about his noble lineage, but what most of them remember about him is his belief that he is the son of the bishop of Liège. As he consistently referred to himself, his friends recall that Alexandre could indeed play chess like no other. He was one of those players who enjoyed playing against five or ten concurrent opponents during long evening sessions.

His publishing house is located at four rue Lombardy, Saint-Gilles. The company, Editions Impériales d'Occident, was founded on March 1 1987. Most books in the shop window

mention Alexandre de Saligny as the author. There are not 401 of them, as the author-publisher announces on the back cover, but more than 10. One of the books contains the libretto of an opera that was never staged, *La Belle de Budapest*. Another includes the Italian Belgian crooner Rocco Di Quinto's biography, who enjoyed a brief taste of stardom in the French-speaking part of Belgium at the beginning of the 1980s.

The reader shall later discover Rocco Di Quinto "does it" with his choir's underage singers. He conceived a child with one of them. 'The new legislation on child labour threatens to destroy the promising career of Rocco Di Quinto and his Rockets,' writes Alexandre de Saligny.*9

As Françoise de Saligny makes further inquiries, the cases' mystery level goes up slightly. The man who stole her name owns three new cars: a Jaguar and two Porsches. In the cafes of Saint-Gilles, he waves about bundles of banknotes. He is continually 'travelling for business.' In his store, which is seldom open, there is never a customer to be seen.

On October 13 1988, the Vice Brigade of the Brussels Judicial Police startled the habitants of Avenue Paul Dejaer. A door was broken into. A megaphone was deployed to apprehend the suspect hiding in a closet on an upper floor. The action was preceded by a week's stakeout of the location. Raemaekers - tipped off about the legal action- fled to the Netherlands but mistakenly thought the danger had blown over in a mere week. Mrs Françoise de Saligny reads about it in the newspaper. Raemaekers is accused of the repeated rape of Isabelle L, an eleven-year-old girl. In August 1988, he assured her parents that she was endowed with 'a golden voice' and should quickly cut a record. This should preferably be done in Manila, where the recording studios are 'cheap'. He persuaded the parents to invest 205,000 francs in the project. He convinced the dad to wire another 250,000 Belgian francs by money order from Manila. Little Isabelle makes such an impression on the local record executives that there is already talk of an album. Isabelle spends forty-one days in the Philippines in the company of her "impresario". He does take her to a studio, but not to the recording studio she expects. In the hotel room, a video camera on a tripod awaits her.*10

The investigation also reveals that in the weeks before his arrest, the suspect was busy completing administrative formalities to set up a non-profit organisation called SOS Enfants en Détresse (SOS Children in Need). He planned to close his bookstore and open a children's refuge home in the vacant space. It later emerged that in 1986, he had acted as the unofficial guardian for an entire year of a thirteen-year-old girl unwanted by her mother, a marginal woman from Charleroi. Sylviane B, who lived with Raemaekers, says she was raped and abused several times. No one wants to believe Sylviane B, not even her mother - not even when the name of Raemaekers, accused of paedophilia, is smeared all over the press. With one statement - 'she is making it up' - the mother ensures that Sylviane B's testimony will remain without consequence. This is still the case today.

On June 7 1989, Raemaekers was convicted of using fake IDs. As a result of a complaint by Françoise de Saligny, he may never again use his beloved pseudonym.*11 Not even three weeks later, a new conviction followed. For what he did to Isabelle L., the Brussels criminal court gives him a prison sentence of five years, two of which are suspended.

During this trial, Raemaekers denies even the existence of sunlight. Contrary to the child's claims, he never penetrated her and never forced her to give him a blowjob, he states. Four years later, during searches in Rotterdam, detectives recovered a recording showing Isabelle L was telling the truth. It now appears that another child was mistreated on camera in Manila. This is a Filipino girl for whom there is not even an attempt at identification.*12

As pitiful was Jean-Paul Raemaekers' disappearance from the Brussels scene in 1989, he was back in the limelight two years later. After serving only a third of his sentence, released on October 14 1991, he rents an office building on the Avenue Louise in Brussels. At number 163, near the Banking and Finance Commission's headquarters, he advertises short-term interest rate investments of 22 per cent or more. Raemaekers is now an investor. 'The number one in international investments', states a Yellow Pages ad. On March 3 1992, only a year and a half after starting up his investment office, he

established a joint venture called Placements Experts Finance Internationale (PEFI) at the Chamber of Commerce in Brussels. Raemaekers promotes his wife to executive director and appoints himself 'President Directeur General'.*13 No one knows why, but Raemaekers is wealthier than ever. He makes short trips to Paraguay and Nigeria in the summer of 1992. 'In Paraguay, I've once set up a bank; it's pretty easy there,' he will later proclaim.*14

A few weeks before Raemaekers went to Paraguay, journalist Guy Legrand visited the PEFI office. Legrand is in charge of the investors' column for the well-respected weekly "Trends" magazine, facing the summer story drought and seeking a light entertainment story. Reality exceeds his wildest expectations. 'It is remarkable how a house of such gravitas has remained so invisible,' he mocks a week later in Trends.*15 For over an hour, Raemaekers has beaten him around the ears with Luxembourg interest rates first reaching 10 per cent and fifteen minutes later already 13.5 per cent. What has stayed with Guy Legrand the most is the conversation that started when he rested his gaze on the world map decorated with small paper flags.

- And what is that?
- It gives you an overview of the countries in which we operate.
- That's quite impressive for such a new company.
- Oh, but we're expanding. You see that office building next door?
- That beautiful new building?
- Yes, we'll be renting 250 square meters in September.

At the end of the interview, Legrand remembers, Raemaekers was already talking about 'ten floors', claimed to be trading stocks and bonds of many hundreds of millions every day, and was talking about 65 banks from as many countries with

whom he was negotiating every day... 'I checked out some of the banks he mentioned. As I could expect, they turned out not to exist'.*16 Legrand is surprised about one thing. Jean-Paul

Raemaekers turns out, as he claims, to be indeed a member of the Mensa, the association of self-proclaimed super-intellectuals. To prove it, he placed a large advertisement in the stock exchange newspaper *Echo de la Bourse* on June 11 1992. In the ad, he reported on the lecture he had given a few days earlier at a Mensa meeting near Charleroi.

Using the Mensa membership for commercial purposes is not allowed, but Mensa did not have the time to take Raemaekers to task. On June 2 1992, he was indicted by examining magistrate Van Espen for 'unauthorised usage of the government pensions system, forgery in writing and use thereof'. The Banking and Finance Commission had already alerted the Brussels public prosecutor's office in February 1992, even before PEFI was set up. PEFI has no license to trade with an international investor. Raemaekers must present a mandate from a recognised foreign bank. 'Oh, I'll fetch that,' Raemaekers tells the committee members when they call him to the stand. A little later, he returns with the requested certificate. It is from the International Swan Bank of Paraguay. Before the Banking and Finance Commission discovered that this bank did not exist, someone discovered that the certificate was forged in the copy centre around the corner.

On January 22 1993, the Brussels Commercial Court imposed a trading ban on the company. The proceedings are of no consequence, as PEFI had already gone into liquidation on August 30 1992. After that, Raemaekers continued trading money under company names such as International Swan Bank or Universal Brokers Company Exco for a while. One of his last clients was the French singer Chantal Goya. Raemaekers "lent" her 200 million Belgian francs; her attentive lawyers prevented Raemaekers from making off with part of the guarantee using a forged signature. Two hundred million francs is about the size of the hole that PEFI has dug.

This is more or less the sequence of events, although no one has ever been able to explain how Raemaekers, barely released from prison, managed to rent a building on Avenue Louise. 'I traded in paedophile material', Raemaekers said candidly during one of the many telephone conversations we had with him in Namur prison in the spring of 1997. Such a network involves a lot of money. And what money, does the

reader think, was laundered through PEFI? The proceeds of trade in child pornography.*17

On June 30, 1994, the Brussels criminal court sentenced Raemaekers to six years of effective imprisonment for fraud, fraudulent bankruptcy, and abuse of trust. He appealed but received a more severe sentence. On January 5, 1995, the court of appeal gave him seven years effective.

During those days, Raemaekers sat in a prison cell anxiously awaiting another trial, that of the Brussels assize court.

Just before the jury retires for deliberation on Friday, January 27 1995, the defendant gets the last word. He understood things were not going well and lapsed into a long-winded argument. He speaks again at breakneck speed with intermittent brief pauses for effect. Jean-Paul Raemaekers asks for forgiveness. 'From the children, from their families, from all those whom I have harmed... I will not complain about the punishment I deserve. My regret is sincere. I only hope to receive treatment during my incarceration. When I see children, the excitement becomes stronger than myself... I, the assailant, the swindler, I want to repent. But more than that, I will set the machinery in motion. I am the scapegoat who will now go to jail while the bigwigs will stay out of harm's way.' There is confusion in the courtroom. The defendant takes out a sheet of paper, starts waving it ostentatiously and prepares to read out a whole series of customers' names. Chairwoman Karin Gerard reaches for the gavel.

- Mr Raemaekers, what you are doing is inadmissible!
- But I can prove it, Madam President.
- I want to acknowledge your sudden request to start naming accomplices, but I cannot allow this during a public hearing.
- Ok then, I will communicate the names to the appropriate authorities later. Then, I also kept several videotapes in a safe place that proved me right. In addition, I left a one-hundred-and-fifty-page statement with a notary. This will be handed over to the Judiciary as soon as anything were to happen to me*18

The paper was handed over to the Brussels Public Prosecutor's Office and would later serve as the basis for several

informational investigations by the Brussels Public Prosecutor's Office in 1995. With a trembling hand, Raemaekers scribbled down five names. The first is that of a Brussels magistrate; the four others are creditors in the PEFI file.*19

The jury returns three hours after this incident. They answer “yes” to all the questions asked of them. Guilty across the board. Judge Karin Gerard sentences Jean-Paul Raemaekers to a life sentence with hard labour.

NOTES

1. Telex news agency Belga, January 23, 1995.
2. Reconstruction based on newspaper articles and interviews with those present.
3. Dossier 5192 of investigating judge Van Espen.
4. Document of indictment for the public prosecutor of Brussels, Raymond Loop, December 2, 1994
5. Vers L'avenir, 25th July, 1987
6. Raemaekers experiences his first contact with the justice system in the early 1970s when, as a nineteen-year-old in Blankenberge, he steals bicycles and harasses underage girls.
7. For fraudulent bankruptcy, swindling, abuse of trust and issuing counterfeit checks.
8. On March 20 1991, the Paris Correctional Court sentenced him in absentia to 3 years in prison for fraud.
9. *Le Rêve de Di Quinto Rocco*, Alexandre de Saligny, Editions Impériales d'Occident, pages. 90-93.
10. *La Dernière Heure*, 15 October 1988.
11. Under penalty of a 50,000 Belgian Franc fine.
12. At the correctional trial on June 29 1989, Raemaekers was convicted of assault and injuring a secretary who worked for him.
13. His previous convictions do not allow Raemaekers to hold a directorship.
14. Telephone contact with Jean-Paul Raemaekers, June 28 1997.
15. *Trends*, 2 Juli 1992.
16. Conversation with Guy Legrand, January 1997.

17. Telephone conversation with Jean-Paul Raemaekers, June 23 1997.
18. Reconstruction based on newspaper articles and interviews with attendees.
19. The document will be sent to the Brussels Prosecutor's Office for further investigation. Brussels BOB, March 27, 1995, PV 104.017.

2 'I found that he had contact with unidentified individuals who left no trace of their visits'

A former lawyer of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, 28 October 1996

As always, they are there. The hagglers, the tightwads, the antique dealers, the blabbermouths from around the corner, and the flea market customers. It is Thursday, December 7th 1995, late in the afternoon. In the hangar on the Onafhankelijkheidsstraat in Molenbeek, Brussels, the auctioneer is pacing through the lots numbered 182 to 308, keen to get home. Bailiff Michel Leroy and his assistant François Daniel are in a hurry, too. The audience bids capriciously. Lot 203, consisting of two television sets, goes under the hammer for no more than one thousand Belgian francs. A Durst enlarger, usually worth a lot of money, was sold for 300 francs. Lot 232, the Corona sewing machine, remains unsold. Lot 216, a box of twenty CDs, triggers a round of frantic bidding. Proceeds: 6,000 francs. Lot 243, holding 27 videocassettes, reached 1,600 francs. Lot 255, containing 322 original videocassettes, changes hands for the exceptionally high sum of 20,000 francs. And 430 tapes recorded by the previous owner himself (and 60 empty VHS boxes) reach the not-unimpressive sum of 8,000 francs. 'There is no rationale in this,' states an expert. Two obsessed collectors' participation is sometimes all it takes to suddenly make a few worthless pieces very expensive.*1

Perhaps this is the simple explanation for why the price of Jean-Paul Raemaekers' videotapes reached such dizzy heights that day during the public auction of the remaining assets of the SA PEFI. Nevertheless, the Neufchâteau Court of Justice was surprised when the press reported on this public sale at the end of 1997. Until then, nobody had noticed that this had become the improbable fate of the assets of one of the few child pornography wholesalers that the Belgian justice system ever managed to apprehend.

Detectives knew that part of Raemaekers' video collection went missing during the judicial investigation but could only guess how this could have happened. On February 17, 1997, the curator of PEFI, the Brussels lawyer Tom Gutt, wrote to the Brussels public prosecutor's office.*2 From press reports

on the excavations conducted by Jean-Paul Raemaekers in an old coal mine in Jumet, he concludes that Neufchâteau is interested in Mr Raemakers' past. In his letter, Gutt expresses his surprise that no government official has contacted him. He explains that shortly after Raemaekers' arrest, a significant stack of videocassettes was dropped off at his door. 'In total, we are talking about some two thousand cassettes,' Gutt writes. 'The court never vetted these cassettes. They were selected at the time based on the labels that Jean-Paul Raemaekers had stuck on them.*3

The account tallies up. In Rotterdam, just under four thousand videotapes were obtained at the time. In the investigation that led the tapes' owner to a jury trial, only two thousand were scrutinised by the BOB Special Investigations Branch. The remaining two thousand tapes, which could harbour child pornography among the hours of ordinary TV recordings and harmless movies, are stacked in a hangar of judicial expert André Fourneau in Anderlecht. He wants to eliminate them as quickly as possible due to lack of space and has already urged Gutt to burn the whole lot.

Investigators from the Brussels BOB came to collect the entire cargo in the hangar in Anderlecht on 12 March 1997, and they found not two thousand but 797 videotapes.*4 For a long time, they assumed the curator had made a mistake and his statement about 'two thousand cassettes' was an overestimation. We now know that 779 cassettes were auctioned in Molenbeek on December 7th 1995. Adding this number to 797 brings us close to the two thousand Gutt mentions in his letter. These events lead us to conclude that the Brussels public prosecutor's office rashly wasted at least half of this potentially precious material. Examining magistrate Van Espen, who led the investigation into PEFI, maintains that he reported the collection's total size to all who were supposed to know. His colleague Damien Vandermeersch states he never knew anything about two thousand unexamined videotapes.

The 797 recovered tapes show no suspicious scenes. But there are reasons to believe that the 779 auctioned tapes were of a much more dubious nature. The police report on the auction mentioned 322 'original videocassettes' among them.*5 These are purchased feature films; paedophiles habitually disguise their favourite scenes by concealing them in innocuous feature films – preferably a Walt Disney. The most

horrific scenes are usually found on the tapes whose packaging least suggests it.

Jean-Paul Raemaekers was undoubtedly very worried about his video collection. A month after his arrest in Rotterdam, he wrote a handwritten plea from prison to the curator Tom Gutt:

`With this, I permit myself to request the return of certain goods before they are sold and kept by your care at Mr Fourneau's. I.e., the clothes of my three children (11 years, nine years and ten months), the clothes of my wife, my clothes, personal objects of our three children, the stuffed animals of our children, the school exercise books and textbooks of our children, the video cassettes with recordings from the television, everything that is unsellable.'*6

Raemaekers was still convinced that steely denial and bluffing were his best strategy during that period. He lives in hope, as it later turns out, that obscure forces within the Belgian legal system will come to his aid. Unlike the clothes, the school exercise books and teddy bears, he does not get his cassettes back. This also means that the Brussels court will not fully exploit this material. `People there knew perfectly well who I was and who I could whistleblow on if I wanted to,' Raemaekers later told me. After my arrest, they sent me signals. They would have me interned. That way, I would be free again after a year or so. I can't explain what went wrong and why I got life imprisonment. All evidence that incriminates the individuals I worked for, found in 1993, has already been concealed during the investigation'.*7

How credible is Raemaekers? A Brussels police officer who questioned him several times still can't tell for sure. `Sometimes I think: there is no point, he is crazy, we are wasting our time. On the other hand, you can't get around to the fact that for years, he was in a criminal environment about which we know little to nothing. It was he who explained to us that among paedophiles, there is mainly bartering. Despite the spectacular stories, this is the thesis that we will maintain until further notice: he started abusing children in front of the camera because he had no material to exchange. Now, however you look at it, Raemaekers has to be a source of useful information.'

Right at the start of the jury tribunal, Raemaekers aroused the interest of the Brussels BOB. And not only because of the threat that he would set the machinery in motion. After his trial, Raemaekers tried to convince the somewhat sceptical detectives that Nancy P and Nelly DV, like most of the other victims, were 'lent' by their mother for pennies. Raemaekers claimed that their mother was perfectly aware of what was happening. That he kept her out of harm's way during the investigation, says Raemaekers, 'was part of the deal.'

On February 1, 1995, not even a week after the trial, BOB inspector Boon made a startling discovery. Raemaekers' account in the prison of Vorst had been subject to several anonymous deposits. The few deposits that reference it are 'Madrid' or 'Leclercq'. Initially, Boon could only find the post office from which the money -mostly sums between one and two thousand francs- was deposited at the counter. The post office is located at 22 Dokter Dejaselaan in Schaarbeek. No one named Madrid or Leclercq resides on that street or in the surrounding neighbourhood.

Nancy and Nelly's mother keeps an address in the Dokter Dejaselaan. After a long search, Boon identified the anonymous donor based on the handwriting on two postal mandates. It is the mother.*8

One can assume that Raemaekers, a professional grifter, lent her money at the time and that she is paying off her debt in small instalments. It is feasible she did, but for anyone who saw even a few seconds of Nancy and Nelly's torture, it is inconceivable that even a mother would give the perpetrator any money - especially if he is in prison. Besides, the two girls no longer lived with their mother in 1995.

When the BOB interrogated Raemaekers on February 20, 1995, he explained that he had already collected a total of about 400,000 Belgian francs in hush money from anonymous paedophiles or from parents who lent out their children to him. As far as Nancy and Nelly's mother is concerned, he states without hesitation that she regularly 'lent' her daughters to adult men for an hour or two at the rate of 10,000 francs. He also named some of these individuals.*9 During the same hearing, the first since his conviction, Raemaekers talks about

sex parties with minors at various addresses in Brussels and gives the first names of what seem to be small cogs in a large, well-oiled machine. Among other matters, he mentions a recording studio address in the avenue Molière in Uccle, where videos were produced for paedophile clientele and where he claims to have also taken Isabelle L.*10 The investigation revealed nearly two years later that Raemaekers was referring to a recording studio where one of the managers in the mid-80s had business relationships with another firm where none other than Bernard Weinstein worked shortly after he arrived in Belgium.

In early 1995, the BOB could not have known Bernard Weinstein. And even if the Frenchman had caught their attention by then, coincidence could be a valid explanation. A cloud of uncertainty surrounds the post-Raemaekers investigations during this period. The investigators could not get to grips with this quixotic character. At times, he is combative but remorseful, revenge being his only motive for talking. On other occasions, he patronises his interrogators, his eyes filled with glee, alluding to being protected by influential people who could halt this investigation at any time.

When two Brussels BOB investigators turned up at the Vorst prison for a second interrogation on March 15, 1995, Raemaekers blankly refused to leave his cell. The one thing they learn about his state of being is that 'he is under severe pressure'. He is even more nervous than usual and says that his lawyers have forbidden him from making any more statements to the police or the BOB.

The amount of people who have come to see Raemaekers in prison since February 1 1995, is impressive. He had received twenty-six visits. Not bad for a paedophile recently sentenced to life imprisonment. The number of lawyers from the entourage of his initial counsel, Jean-Paul Dumont, who visit him in prison in Forest is remarkable.

Marc Depaus, Patrick Gueuning and Sylvie Théron. Dumont and lawyer Jean-Marie Flagothier also visited Raemaekers in that period.*11 Brussels commercial law judge Raymond De Smedt also visits him. He is active as a volunteer with the SAJ Autrement, an organisation that assists inmates. Raemaekers handed De Smedt a lengthy and impassioned letter stating that

he no longer wanted to be interrogated by BOB investigators but only by the judicial police. In the letter which landed on the desk of the Brussels prosecutor Benoit Dejemeppe on March 22nd 1995, Raemaekers promised to provide solid evidence about a paedophile judge, a significant money-laundering operation, a specific murder, a secret terrorist group and some random information about the Augusta affair, a paedophile network and the in Belgium infamous 'pink ballets' affair. Whether these claims made any impression on Dejemeppe is unknown, but he certainly did not comply with Raemaekers' request. The investigation remained with the BOB, intrigued as to why Raemaekers suddenly preferred the Brussels Judicial Police.

According to the records of the prison of Vorst, between February 20 and March 15, no Judicial Police officer visited Raemaekers. 'Two investigators from the judicial police did come,' Raemaekers claims a year and a half later when he had repaired his relationship with the BOB. 'They had been sent by the Brussels commissioner Georges Marnette. Marnette is a good friend of Jean-Paul Dumont. It was Dumont who forbade me any contact with the gendarmerie. I would deliver my information solely to the Judicial Police, but only after Dumont had vetted it.'*12

If everything had gone according to plan, Jean-Paul Dumont would have been a minister today, president of the PSC (Wallonia's Socialist Party), or something along those lines. In the 1970s, he was one of the PSC's golden boys and chairman of the PSC's youth organisation. He joined Cepic, the ultra-right-wing think tank of the PSC, founded and led by former Prime Minister Paul Vanden Boeynants. Several prominent Cepic members -headed by Vanden Boeynants and Baron Benoit de Bonvoisin- would later become involved, as would the Cepic itself, in all sorts of dubious affairs, inclusive of lending financial support to the extreme-right wing cell Front de la Jeunesse. As a promising lawyer, Dumont later defended members of this terrorist group, of which some were convicted for an arson attack on the left-wing weekly magazine Pour in 1981.*13 These were the first names in a contact list which, looked at retrospectively, could easily serve as a glossary of key names for twenty years of organised crime in Belgium.

This list would contain the names of the alleged members of the Brabant/Killers of Nivelles gang (Adriano Vittorio), ex-gendarme Madani Bouhouche, Eric Lammers (of the neo-Nazi group Westland New Post), Patrick Haemers' gang member Axel Zeyen, Michel Nihoul, the former Brussels Judicial Police commissioner Frans Reyniers, the gang boss godfather Carmelo Bongiorno... It is probably an incomplete inventory but offers insight into the spheres of influence in which Jean-Paul Dumont dwelled.

At the end of the 1980s, Dumont became the informal head of a small circle of lawyers who converged on the same clients and judicial dossiers for many years, such as the ones concerning Baron de Bonvoisin, who was involved in countless affairs. Dumont also shared an office with lawyer Didier De Quévy, Marc Dutroux's lawyer, in 1989. He also worked closely with Martial Lancaster, Philippe Deleuze, who has since disappeared from the scene and was a close friend of Michel Nihoul, and Julien Pierre, Dutroux's current lawyer.

Jean-Paul Dumont's fall from grace was as spectacular as his climb to the top. In July '95, his license to judicial practice was suspended for nine months for indecent exposure and because he took medical leave in the morning of a significant jury tribunal in Liège but managed to take part in a TV debate that same afternoon. In the same period, the Brussels substitute Jean-François Godbille received an invoice for business cards he never ordered. The investigation revealed that Dumont had them printed. A rumour crops up that he wanted to distribute them in the Brussels brothels. Substitute Judge Godbille was leading judicial investigations into Carmelo Bongiorno and Benoit de Bonvoisin at the time. The Brussels branch of the PSC, for which Dumont now only holds a mandate as a municipal councillor in Uccle, would rather see the back of him.

It is no secret that Commissioner Georges Marnette and lawyer Jean-Paul Dumont are close friends. How close is not so clear. At the beginning of 1997, a member of the Minister of the Interior Johan Vande Lanotte's cabinet reported to the public prosecutor's office in Neufchâteau that the lawyer and the Commissioner had jointly set up a company in Montreal,

Canada, and had been observed there frequently in each other's company. During the same period, some Brussels magistrates stated in the weekly magazine Humo that Dumont was a regular informant of Marnette. The two would frequently meet in the restaurant Mok Ma Zwet, an establishment that owed its fame mainly because a gangster from the Patrick Haemers gang went into hiding there for a while during the 1980s. Another regular meeting place is the restaurant "Le Vieux Bruxelles" in the Brussels Ilot Sacré. The owner of this establishment is one Michel Laval, about whom Achille Haemers -Patrick's father- claims that he gave him money for a startup enterprise. When a Humo journalist questions him, Marnette responds that Brussels Judiciary Police members regularly organise lunches in one of Laval's establishments. Former Brussels chief of police Frans Reyniers and head of the Belgian judicial police Christian De Vroom also often frequented Le Vieux Bruxelles. As for Dumont, Marnette says they got to know each other in 1984 and became friends. 'Once in a while, we went out for dinner together. Not often, ten times at most. We had an explicit agreement: during dinner, there was never any talk of any legal affairs which involved either of us.'*14

It is not so exceptional for the gendarmerie and the Judicial Police to poach a case from each other through underhand means. The incredible part about Dumont

and Marnette's interest in Raemaekers is that the entire affair revolves around a madman's statements. A year and a half after the events, BOB investigators, newly engaged in the Neufchâteau investigation, learned from a privileged witness what had transpired in the weeks and months following the Jury trial. On October 28, 1996, they interrogated Marc Depaus, the man who was told by Jean-Paul Dumont a week before the start of the trial that he and his colleague Patrick Gueuning would have to manage this case for a while. Dumont told them he was suffering from a bout of depression, which had also forced him to abandon the defence of ex-gendarme and top gangster Madani Bouhouche before the Brabant assize court a few weeks earlier. 'He felt that we stood a better chance with two young lawyers than with an established

lawyer because this way an amalgamation and client/lawyer ambiguity could be avoided,' says Depaus.

For Depaus, then thirty-five years old, the Raemaekers trial turned out to be a debacle. By the end of 1996, he was no longer a lawyer, which gave the investigators the advantage of being able to interrogate him without a meddlesome Solicitor General present. Depaus explains that Raemaekers had already informed him during the first interviews of his intention to announce in court that he wanted to sue some 'high-ups' should 'things go wrong'. It is unclear to Depaus whether there is a connection between this plan and Dumont's resignation. Depaus remembers the top litigator following the trial intensively but from behind the scenes. He was always available and mapped out the entire strategy from his office. It seemed that Dumont was the only person Raemaekers had complete confidence in.

About Raemaekers' unwillingness to speak to the BOB any longer, the ex-lawyer can recall that after the trial, he contacted examining magistrate Vandermeersch with this proposal: sentence reduction in exchange for information. Vandermeersch rejected the offer. According to Depaus, Dumont only then went down the Judiciary Police route. 'After mediation by Dumont -whom I had asked for advice- I met with two Judiciary Police inspectors. Afterwards, I realised I had put my hands in a hornet's nest. I then stepped away from that track.'

- You used the word 'wasp nest'. Can you specify what you mean?
- I used the word 'wasps' nest' because the matter initially seemed simple. Raemaekers had a certain amount of information and wanted to negotiate on it. The first track consisted of examining the feasibility and modalities of that negotiation. After my visit to Magistrate Vandermeersch, I began to ask myself what level of support the investigators enjoyed because of their hierarchy. On the other hand, a rivalry exists within this police service, and I found out that Raemaekers established contacts with unidentified individuals who left no trace of their visits. These factors made me realise that I was playing a game without knowing half of its rules. It is in that context that I withdrew myself.

- Raemaekers states that Dumont chose the judicial police because of his valuable contacts with Commissioner Marnette. Can you confirm this and tell us anything about those contacts?
- I wonder if Dumont preferred the Judiciary Police because of his contacts with Commissioner Marnette. Still, Dumont and Commissioner Marnette have indeed known each other for a long time (...).
- During his interrogations, Raemakers told us he had documents, even video cassettes, to support his information. Did you know these documents existed?
- Yes, I know that these documents exist. If the negotiations had been successful, I would have taken responsibility for obtaining them, but currently I do not know where they are.
- You say that these documents exist. Have you ever seen them yourself?
- I have never seen them myself.
- Did Raemaekers tell you at the time where they were and where you should go to get them?
- No.*15

The few remaining friends of Raemaekers are just as affirmative about the existence of incriminating documents and videotapes as Marc Depaus was that morning in the Brussels BOB offices. 'They are in a safe deposit box in a Zurich bank,' one assured us in early 1997. Another inmate believes that Raemaekers has hidden his merchandise in Peru or Paraguay. In a conspiratorial tone, one could assume that he is not as crazy as he seems and has provided himself with a life insurance policy.

Regardless, Raemaekers did not notice any improvement in his situation in 1995 and 1996. He moved to the place most despised by inmates in the country: Bergen Prison. In the filthy and overcrowded institution, he caught stories about paedophiles bullied to death. He believed he witnessed a case of food poisoning that was classified as a suicide. Raemaekers consumed tranquillisers as if they were candy. In Bergen, he let the events pass by in a daze. Occasionally, he called his best friend, John M Verswyver, to tell him that 'they betrayed' him and that his revenge would be sweet – if that day ever came. He secured a transfer to Namur prison, fell ill, and sank deeper and deeper into inertia.

Then, the Dutroux case erupted.

NOTES

1. De Morgen, 12 November 1997.
2. Tom Gutt appears briefly in the Dutroux affair. He is the counsel for the Nigerian West family, which lives in Ixelles with the cult Celestian Church of Christ, the alleged linchpin in a human trafficking circuit set up by Annie Bouty.
3. Letter from Tom Gutt, February 17, 1997. Brussels PDO, March 6, 1997, PV's 150.635 and 150.636.
4. Brussels BOB, March 12, 1997, PV 150.693.
5. The official report of the auction reveals even more about Jean-Paul Raemaekers. Among the objects to be auctioned were many internal freemasonry documents. Presumably, Raemaekers was not only a member of the Mensa but also of a lodge.
6. Letter from Jean-Paul Raemaekers to lawyer Tom Gutt, July 7, 1993.
7. Telephone contacts with Jean-Paul Raemaekers, June 1997.
8. Findings BOB Brussels, February 1 and 2, 1995, PV's 101.299 and 101.923.
9. When questioned on March 1, 1995, Nancy P. denied it. However, both her interrogators and the psychologist who assisted them retained their suspicion that the woman was hiding a lot.
10. Interrogation Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 20 February 1995, PV 10 1.925
11. Findings BOB Brussels, 15 March 1995, PV 103.625.
12. Hearings of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussel, 19 October 1996, PV 115.417 and 29 October 1996, PV 116.351.
13. *Pour* was about to unveil revelations about the investigation into the Pinon case, better known as the Pink Ballets case, in which top politicians and magistrates were suspected of taking part in sex parties with minors.
14. Hilde Geens and Raf Sauviller, Humo, 18 February 1997.

15. Interrogation of Marc Depaus, BOB Brussels, 28 October 1996, PV 116.342.

3 These cassettes, he said, show high-ranking individuals.'

Cellmate of Jean-Marie Raemaekers, 21 September 1996

- 'What do you think about this now?'
- 'Pfft.'
- 'It doesn't bother you?'

- 'The things people worry about ... It's the most normal thing in the world.'
- 'Alexandre, the country is on edge.'
- 'All hypocrites! You know, there are some families in Belgium willing to sell their children for two hundred or three hundred thousand (Belgian) francs. Then you can do what you want with them. They have been offered to me more than once.'

This conversation, Serge Loriaux recounts a month later, made him realise that he had been sharing a confined space for six weeks with an individual who was just as bad or even worse than Marc Dutroux himself. In early August, the Namur prison administration informed Loriaux that he would be transferred to another cell. His new cellmate seemed delighted to be in this prison, and not the one in Mons. He introduced himself as Alexandre de Saligny, bank director.

Loriaux could tell they had something in common from how he said it. He is a nihilistic forty-something who replies 'artistic painter' when asked how he made a living before ending up here. The court's verdict of Namur describes him differently as an incorrigible swindler.' Serge Loriaux made all kinds of lucrative deals with credit lenders after discovering that some upstanding citizen was walking around with the same name as him and was even born on the same day.

Loriaux and Raemaekers get along well at first. One will be released in a year or so but is up to his ears in debt. For the other, the prison gate won't open until the turn of the century, but money does not seem to be a concern. Unnamed sources told Loriaux that Raemaekers had spent 600,000 Belgian francs in three years while in prison on luxury goods, loans to fellow prisoners, and shady deals much debated amongst the prisoners, but no one being the wiser. Intriguingly, Brussels BOB investigators later discover that Raemaekers does not have to spend a penny on lawyer's fees. His current lawyer is Jean-Marie Flagothier, a particular individual who was active in the 1980s with the poujadist middle-class party RAD/UDR. According to private detective André Rogge, he was also a member of the Brabant Military Reserve Officers' organisation, abbreviated to BROL, which later fell into disrepute due to its involvement in the Gladio affair. One of the more prominent members of this militaristic

club is the son of ex-Belgian prime minister Paul Vanden Boeynants.

One can claim without any exaggeration that Flagothier is one of the few remaining true militant Belgians. The affable intellectual has a practice in the shadow of the Atomium monument and specialises in military law. It is unclear what motivated him, from 1995 onwards, to work pro-bono on the rather hopeless Raemaekers case. During discreet conversations with journalists, Flagothier will let slip several times that it is thanks to him that Raemaekers could be extricated from the clutches of Jean-Paul Dumont. Others claim that Dumont and Flagothier are actually in league with each other and intended to play this paedophile -sentenced to life imprisonment- as a joker in a bizarre game of smoke screens and false accusations that will keep the country in its' grip from August 1996 onwards.

Jean-Marie Flagothier visits Raemaekers in prison at least once a week. Raemakers' generous lifestyle and the lawyer's frequent visits increase the street credibility he enjoys among the prison inmates. Serge Loriaux tells the investigators that Raemaekers is permanently on the lookout for someone to broker deals with. He seems to be looking for a hitman without specifying the potential target. He, Loriaux, also received an offer. Raemaekers asked him to take a trip outside Europe after his release to collect a bunch of documents and videotapes. The conversation turned to Peru, where Raemaekers claims he owns a villa and where Loriaux - if he wanted to - could work as a house painter. Loriaux explains to his cellmate that there is a substantial difference between a painter's canvas and a house facade. However, that doesn't change Raemaekers' determination to task his new friend with some mission. Loriaux is initially eager to do so. He knows that bailiffs and collection agencies will pursue him upon his release in February 1998.*2

Serge Loriaux rented a TV set and did not miss a second of the news broadcasts from August 16th onwards: Sabine and Laetitia (2 of the girls kidnapped by Dutroux) were led into a police car, shivering. Prosecutor Michel Bourlet announces under flashing cameras that he has the immense pleasure of reporting the release of not one but two girls.

Inhabitants of the towns of Kain and Bertrix are setting off celebratory bonfires. Marc Dutroux was handcuffed on the steps of the courthouse in Neufchâteau. Michel Nihoul. The diggers in Sars-la-Buissière. Burial pictures of Julie and Melissa. Raemaekers, too, is intently following the news events on Loriaux's TV set and cannot restrain himself from commenting on the images. Loriaux deduces from Raemaekers' remarks that, in his opinion, this whole affair is nothing more than a sideshow, the scope of which is dwarfed by what he knows and the tapes he has in his possession. 'He kept on saying that the videotapes the police had shown to his wife were nothing compared to other ones he claims to possess,' Loriaux explains to the BOB. 'He told me that these tapes showed important Belgian personalities having sex with minors. He said that if these tapes were to fall into the judiciary's hands, it would cause a huge shock. Judging by his words, there were even ministers involved.*3 According to his cellmate's story, Loriaux suspects a more trivial reason as to why Raemaekers won't unconditionally reveal the whereabouts of his treasure and prefers instead to control its' potential transfer: 'There is also material of such nature that it could cost him a second life sentence.'

The Dutroux case quickly leads to a modest population migration within the Belgian prisons. Without much explanation, prison wardens separate their sex offenders from the other prisoners. As such, Loriaux is transferred to another cell in mid-September. He volunteers for the investigators to put him back in the cell with Raemaekers so that he can question him further now that he has gained Raemaekers' trust. The BOB officers were delighted with this proposal but met with opposition from the prison administration in Namur.

On Sunday, August 18, 1996, a silent procession of mourners in Sars-la-Buissière lay flowers at Julie and Melissa's temporary grave while passers-by stared at a small poster outside the window of café L'Embuscade. The poster, a low-quality photocopy, shows the face of a girl called Sylvie Carlin, nineteen years old. She disappeared on December 15th 1994, in Rocourt. Sylvie Carlin? No one had ever heard of her. In the following days, newspapers published ever longer daily lists of children who had disappeared or had been murdered in unknown circumstances. In Neufchâteau, the investigators are

overwhelmed with tips. It becomes clear to examining Judge Jean-Marc Connerotte and prosecutor Michel Bourlet that they are dealing with a form of criminality, the existence of which is denied up to this point. Marc Dutroux pushes the boundaries of reason. In addition to the emergence of a whole array of leads, the magistrates in Neufchâteau feel overwhelmed by a purely human, almost intuitive sense that the derailed psyche and actions of one man cannot adequately explain the current events. Although (still) unproven, the existence of a criminal network behind Marc Dutroux and Michel Nihoul is considered a certainty in those early days of the inquiry.

This becomes even more evident when the first threats are made; Michel Bourlet and Jean-Marc Connerotte are forced to live like hostages. They are under constant guard by units of the Special Intervention Squadron (SIE) of the Gendarmerie. Connerotte's home is turned into a fortified castle. Amid this turmoil, Bourlet stays in contact with the parents of murdered and missing children. Connerotte delivered search warrants daily. Half of Hainaut is uprooted.

There is a need for reinforcements. On Tuesday, August 20, during a business meeting in Neufchâteau, Justice Minister Stefaan De Clerck promises a substantial resource increase. That day, as he leaves the humble courthouse, De Clerck is besieged by the national and international press. He quickly paid a visit to the Russo and Lejeune families in Grâce-Hollogne. He was eager to make a promise to them: never before would so many investigators work on a single case as in the Dutroux case, as per the agreement reached during his business meeting.

Jacques Langlois, a magistrate from Arlon with PSC connections, is temporarily appointed as the second examining magistrate in Neufchâteau. He is to take over from Connerotte all files unrelated to the Dutroux case so that the latter can fully concentrate on investigating the paedophilia networks. Dozens of police officers already responded on Monday, August 19, to a call from Neufchâteau to assist with the investigation. An army of police officers was assembled in a few hours; the distribution of tasks was a matter of improvisation. Whoever is in the right place at the right time will make the most significant gains. The investigations into the prime suspects Marc Dutroux, his wife Michèle Martin and sidekick Michel

Lelièvre remain primarily in the hands of the Gendarmerie brigades of Neufchâteau, Marche-en-Famenne, Bastogne and the surrounding area.*4 Detectives from the Brussels BOB's financial section (3KOS) are called upon to map the money flows stemming from Dutroux's activities. Unravelling the exact role of Michel Nihoul will be a mission for the Judiciary Police's national brigade, assisted by the Brussels Judiciary Police.

One of the most prominent figures who lends Neufchâteau a volunteering hand is Georges Marnette, the Brussels Judiciary Police commissioner, who showed such interest in Jean-Paul Raemaekers in early 1995. In mid-1996, Marnette had a largely unblemished reputation as a seasoned "super cop". He can boast of a quarter of a century of experience, dismantled countless small and large criminal organisations, specialised, among other things, in vice cases and headed the anti-organised crime cell in 1996. In 1984, the same Marnette was one of the first to arrive at the scene of one of the most significant crime mysteries of the country: the 'suicide' of Westland New Post leader Paul Latinus. Marnette had interrogated Latinus several times before that event. In the mid-1990s, he took on the role of that other 'super cop', of whom he had been the right-hand man for years: Frans Reyniers, who was ousted from his throne for having too close connections with the criminal milieu. Like Reyniers in his glory years, Marnette is extremely popular with the Brussels law reporters. Always available, always willing to chat. For years, he held a daily informal press briefing.

Georges Marnette knows the capital's criminal world inside out. In the days after the arrest of Michel Nihoul, he boasts that he had the sex club Les Atrébates, one of Nihoul's regular addresses, closed down in the eighties. The newspapers also mention these feats, so whoever forms an opinion of Marnette based on these articles can only conclude that he is the right man in the right place for this case. Few people know that Les Atrébates was not closed by Marnette but by the Brussels BOB. The former manager, Michel Forgeot, will later declare to the court that Marnette was a regular

customer at his club at the time. In Neufchâteau, the opposition to Marnette initially came from the BOB. He knows the environment too well, they say. It is suggested that his ties with Jean-Paul Dumont could become troublesome in this dossier. Considering the figure of Michel Nihoul, the investigation is creeping towards the far-right Brussels milieu of the PSC political party.

Not a week goes by before Marnette dumbfounded friend and foe in Neufchâteau. He states he has something exciting to reveal to whoever wants to hear. He, the first appointed Commissioner Georges Marnette, has managed to get irrefutable proof of a material link between Marc Dutroux and the dossier of Jean-Paul Raemaekers. 'This find is of the utmost importance,' Marnette will later clarify in an interview. 'This proves that Dutroux is not just the leader of a small criminal gang in Charleroi, but he has ties to another group.*5 The "piece of evidence" consists of an enlarged still from one of the videotapes seized from Raemaekers. In an official report to the attention of Connerotte, Marnette reports on 31 August 1996: 'The photo marked "P37 letter I" particularly drew our attention, showing a scene in which a man vaginally penetrates a girl (unknown to us). (...) To obtain the best scientific indicators, we asked the scientific police laboratory, in the person of operator Michel Nowak, to compare the photo of Marc Dutroux taken on 04.02.1986 by the Charleroi police force (photocopy attached) with the photo taken in the dossier (...). Based on this examination, it seems reasonable to us from a scientific point of view to state that the person in the pornographic photo is, indeed, Marc, as mentioned earlier by Dutroux.*6

At the end of his report, Marnette expresses undisguised criticism of the Brussels BOB. He attached a recent newspaper clipping to the photograph, writing about the Dutroux case and Raemaekers' announcement during his trial that he would mention 'names of high-ranking people'.*7 Marnette subtly states in his official report that Raemaekers' spectacular offer was not accepted for some reason unknown to him.

Among the police officers delegated to Neufchâteau by the Brussels BOB's financial section were first Sergeant Eric Eloir, and his colleagues Luc Delmartino and Dany Lesciauskas. They had been chasing the capricious Raemaekers a year

before until they discovered that his lawyer, Jean-Paul Dumont, had forbidden his client from talking to them again.

It is not incomprehensible that the BOB officers turned purple in the face when they got wind of Marnette's stunt. They know the case quite well and regard his report as pure demagoguery. They detect a new move by Dumont and gain an audience with Bourlet and Connerotte. It is not the Brussels Judiciary Police, but the BOB, that will investigate this trail further. Incidentally, the Raemaekers-bis information files have never been closed.*8 So there is no objective reason whatsoever to entrust Raemaekers to Marnette suddenly.

Saturday, September 7, 1996, marks the happy reunion between Raemaekers and the BOB investigators. It has been a year and a half since they faced each other. They notice Raemaekers hasn't changed one bit. His flood of words still makes it nearly impossible to ask him any pertinent questions, let alone write down any answer. The BOB officers have long since given up trying to reproduce Raemaekers' chaotic reflections verbatim in their reports. They are happy if they capture the essence of his argument in a somewhat clear summary. The more difficult circumstance to get used to is Raemaekers' mood swings.

'In 1994, there was a scene like this during an interrogation,' says one of the BOB officers. 'From one moment to the next, his face changed colour. He pounded the table aggressively and screeched like a Spanish fury. No one understood what was happening. "Get that traitor out!" he screamed. The so-called traitor was a gendarme sitting at the back of the room the whole time, listening in. At one point, Raemaekers had detected an incredulous grin on the officer's face. On other days, Raemaekers got angry because he had slept badly or thought the BOB should now scoot off and arrest every name on his list. One of the worst things one could do to him was to ignore him, which could trigger him to cry like a little child. But the worst thing was his mania for conspiracies, his permanent state of paranoia. One morning, we picked him up from jail, and he refused to come out of his cell. "They" had "tried", he said. He was soaked in sweat. Who had tried what? A panicked story came out about men who had sneaked into

his cell that night and tried to kill him. He had been dreaming; that much was obvious. But you weren't allowed to say this out loud. He stayed awake for a whole week because "they" would surely try "it" again. At the end of that week, he was a wreck. That's the entire problem with Raemaekers. He knows a lot, really a lot of things. But some of the stuff he recounts probably exists only in his imagination or has been twisted because of his boundless paranoia.'

Raemaekers immediately understood that the Dutroux case had propelled him to the centre of attention again on Saturday morning. Facing his interrogators, he adopts a pious attitude and claims to be deeply shocked by the past weeks' events.

No, he's not looking for excuses for his misdeeds, but this matter is quite different. He may have destroyed lives, but to murder children? Never. Raemaekers asserts in a solemn voice that this time, he will cooperate unconditionally with the investigation if called upon.

Although Raemaekers is officially questioned within the primary Dutroux dossier framework, the BOB officers discover nothing about Dutroux and his consorts that day. The BOB officers have the gravest doubts about Marnette's 'evidence'. They are not unaware of the blurred image fragment with the number P371. It shows a man with a Dutroux-like haircut, a Dutroux moustache and glasses similar to Dutroux' who, per Marnette's thesis, is raping a child. However, the clip was analysed several years earlier. Looking at the furniture, wallpaper and garments, the investigation concluded that the film must date from the early or mid-1970s. Raemaekers himself speaks with some disdain of 'oldies'. These are primarily 8-millimetre films of sex parties with children, transferred onto VHS later. This stuff is still exchanged intensively amongst the less affluent paedophiles, usually for lack of better material, but over the years, it has travelled far and wide. When the P371 recording was produced, Marc Dutroux was still a young twenty-something who must have looked entirely different from the man in the video clip.

Raemaekers declares that he never met Dutroux. The P371 image does ring a bell. 'It's an old acquaintance from the milieu,' he explains. If the BOB officers had bothered to listen to the original videotape soundtrack, they would have noticed that the would-be Dutroux was speaking in Dutch, which is a foreign language to the real Dutroux.*9

Raemaekers himself, during his interrogation on September 7, picks up where he left off a year and a half earlier: the circuit of "partouzes" (French for group sex parties or orgies) from 1980s Brussels. He talked for hours about a sex party with minors which would have taken place in 1992 in a white villa in Meise. He described the estate with a salvo of details about the ceiling's colour, the carpets, the colour of the canapés, etc. The white villa would later appear frequently in other testimonies. Raemaekers describes how five children, whose ages he estimates at nine to thirteen, are raped by a dozen men. These were people he knew little or nothing about but whose fleet of cars - Jaguars, BMWs and Mercedes cars - he could remember. One of the attendees was a well-known Brussels lawyer, he claims. According to Raemaekers, this kind of party had been organised before, but what shocked him that time 'was that no women were present.' On Sunday, September 15, he provides further details and draws a map of the villa *10.

It was mainly because of this statement that investigating judge Connerotte opened dossier 111/96 at the end of September.*11 Within the Gendarmerie, this part of the investigation was called Operation Dauphin. Despite the well-understood point that Marnette's inquiry does not cut wood, it is acknowledged as the initial report of the 111/96 file, which links Raemaekers to Dutroux.

In parallel, the police inquiry gained new insights that could connect elements of Raemaekers' testimony to the network surrounding Michel Nihoul.

In his official report, Marnette identified the fragment with the code P371. This code suggests that the Judicial Police went to collect the tapes from the registry in Brussels. Nothing is further from the truth, as it turns out. It takes a month for the BOB officers to view all the still available tapes. At the beginning of October, they reported to Connerotte: 'Triggered

by his statements, we collected the confiscated cassettes from the office of Commissioner Marnette, which he had withdrawn from the registry of the disciplinary court. We examined these tapes and did not find the scene in question. We subsequently impounded all the dossiers related to the confiscated goods of Jean-Paul Raemaekers. We have ascertained that the videotapes in question have been destroyed (...). Allow us to state that we do not understand the purpose of the statements made by Marnette. It seems desirable to us to ask Mr Marnette to explain exactly which elements served as the basis for his report of 31/08/96.*12

It seems that Marnette involved Raemaekers in the Dutroux case with the help of a fake official report. 'The underlying intention was evident,' a BOB officer later recalled. Just like a year before, in March 1995, he wanted to gain control over Raemaekers, preferably by interrogating him himself. We don't know why. But if you see what Marnette did shortly afterwards with Elio Di Rupo, then we have at least a strong suspicion.'

It is not uncommon for seized goods to be destroyed, especially if they are part of a criminal investigation that has already led to a conviction and where any chance of a later pardon has expired; however, in Raemaekers' case in 1996, the Brussels public prosecutor's office still had various ongoing judicial investigations for which the seized videotapes could theoretically constitute helpful evidence. Yet, this is what happens. The Raemaekers tapes were put into the oven as quickly as they were put up for public auction.

The wildest stories go around about the cellars of the grand Brussels courthouse. Vast mountains of evidence from old court files are piled up in that expansive basement where allegedly only the rats still know their way around. However, on February 27, 1995, there was no space for a stack of videotapes. That day, the Brussels Court of Appeal decided to have them destroyed. The decision was taken with unprecedented efficiency: the first day after Raemaekers' deadline to appeal against his life imprisonment sentence. The hasty decision to do so, BOB officer Eloir later discovers, was made by Attorney General Marchal. The videotapes were destroyed on June 16, 1996, except for three. Marchal did not

allow the two tapes to disappear. One tape was overlooked during the destruction.*13

In retrospect, Marnette's official August 31, 1996 report achieved precisely the opposite of what he intended. Instead of recruiting Raemaekers as an 'informer,' he had to observe helplessly as the BOB's competitors did precisely that.

On 12, 13 and 15 September 1996, the newspapers *Le Soir* and *La Libre Belgique* reported on Jean-Paul Raemaekers and the Neufchâteau public prosecutor's interest in his past without stating any apparent reason to do so. 'It is clear that the purpose of these articles is not to bring new information about the investigation to the knowledge of the public, but only to draw the attention of "some" to the statements of Raemaekers,' states a report of the BOB officers Eric Eloir and Luc Delmartino.*14 The articles by the journalist Gilbert Dupont of *La Dernière Heure* -whom they suspect is Marnette's bosom friend- enjoy their particular attention. Dupont cannot hide his deep sadness and anger when, on October 31, 1996, he must break the news that Marnette has left the investigation team in Neufchâteau in an atmosphere of don't let the door hit you on the way out. In an article entitled 'The investigation is no longer running smoothly', the journalist writes about 'hidden pressures' and 'sabotage' of the Nihoul investigation.*15 The same page as this tribute article presents another curious piece signed by Gilbert Dupont. It mentions a break-in by unknown characters at the home of lawyer Jean-Paul Dumont. The world is small, as it turns out: 'They made off with fifty thousand Belgian francs, as well as -more significantly- a particular audio cassette since they did not steal any of the other cassettes.' It was merely a cassette on which the lawyer had recorded a conversation with a former client, currently incarcerated in Namur prison. It should be noted that the lawyer refused to intervene on his client's behalf. Who is this client? It is none other than Jean-Paul Raemaekers from Brussels...*16

The article had not escaped the attention of Brussels BOB officers Eloir and Delmartino. Two blatant inaccuracies struck them. One: it is by no means accurate that Dumont would have

refused to assist Raemaekers at the time; quite the contrary. Two, and more intriguingly, no cassette was stolen from Dumont's office. When they learned of the burglary at the lawyer's practice, they immediately contacted the Vorst (a Northern Brussels district) Police Department. The on-duty officer faxed them the official report from October 29, 1996, after the complaint filing, and a computer printout from the 101-emergency service containing a written output of the complaint.*17 The BOB officers can deduce that the burglary occurred during the night of October 28-29 and was ascertained in the morning. However, it appears the Forest Police received no report of the event until 4:45 in the afternoon via the 101 emergency hotline and had arrived on the scene no earlier than 5:19 p.m. At the very least, one expects lawyers to know how to respond to a burglary, but Dumont's associates surprisingly waited a full working day before calling the Police. Before the Police arrived, the Brussels Judicial Police had already discretely visited the scene.*18

`This was probably one of the last interventions of Commissioner Marnette before his departure on vacation,` the two BOB officers assert in a report.*19 In the same document, they also state: 'All these elements confirm our previous conclusions: Raemaekers is a hindrance, and they may be trying to intimidate him.'*20

The officers fear that it was meant for Raemaekers' to be confronted with the newspaper article. It seems certain that no tape was stolen after Advocate Dumont `formally denied' in a press release on the evening of October 31st that anything other than a sum of 50,000 Belgian francs had been taken from his office.

All of this produces a tense atmosphere in the inquest. Without any proof of the existence of something like an influential Brussels paedophilia network, the incidents and police shenanigans during October 1996 reinforce the suspicion that unrest in certain circles is high.

NOTES:

1. At the beginning of 1997, private detective André Rogge delves into the data that led to the excavations in Jumet. He believes that Flagothier helped set up the entire operation. Rogge says he found the lawyer's name in the BROC's statutes.
2. Raemaekers will also help Loriaux find a lawyer. This will be Jean-Marie Flagothier, described above, his lawyer. Raemaekers will add other cell members to Flagothier's clientele in the following months.
3. Interrogation of Serge Loriaux, BOB Brussels, 21 September 1996, PV 116.342.
4. The Arlon judicial police were also involved in this central part of the investigation.
5. Interview with Georges Marnette in the weekly magazine Ciné Revue, January 1997.
6. Judicial Police Brussels, 31 August 1996, PV 38.649.
7. This is an article from the daily Flemish language newspaper Het Nieuwsblad under the headline: 'When I speak, this country will explode.'
8. It concerns the files with the following numbers: BR 37.66.104743/95, BR 37.66.104744/95, and BR 37.66.104748/95.
9. Interrogation Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 7 September 1996, PV 113.243.
10. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 15 September 1996, PV 113.454.
11. At the time, Connerotte had already opened four other dossiers, in addition to the "primary file" on the abduction and murder of children by Marc Dutroux and his associates (86/96): automobile scam (87/96), the disappearance of Loubna Benaïssa (108/96), declarations X1, X2, X3 and X4 (96/109) and declarations Nathalie W (110/96). Later on, we will add protection of X1 (136/96) and the network around businessman L.V. from Walcourt (139/96).
12. Conclusions BOB Brussels, 11 October 1996, PV115.411.
13. Conclusions, BOB Brussels, 11 October 1996, PV 115.411.
14. BOB Brussels, 28 October 1996, PV 116.342.
15. One year later, Gilbert Dupont would report with the same certainty that, thanks to Marnette and his

colleagues' hard work, Michel Nihoul was as innocent as a newborn lamb.

16. La Dernière Heure, October 31, 1996.
17. Police Forest, October 29, 1996, PV 4185 and telex service 101, nr B961024882.
18. Telex 619 of the Police of Forest says, 'Someone from the Judiciary Police lab was already at the scene and did what was necessary.'
19. BOB Brussels, 28 October 1996, PV 116.342.
20. BOB Brussels, 31 October 1996, PV 116.351.

2 Summer 1996

*Marc Dutroux and
Michel Nihoul*

1. Regarding An and Eefje, Marc Dutroux mentioned receiving an order.
Michel Lelièvre, 19 august 1996.

In his grandmother's house in Tamines, Namur, Benoit Lelièvre stares at the TV screen in disbelief. He recognises the timid young man on the TV news broadcast, walking down the courthouse steps in a bulletproof vest; it is his brother. 'I can't believe this was his idea,' says Benoit. 'He was so insecure. As long as I have known him, Michel never really knew what he wanted out of life. He was always into some new fad. First, it was cars, and then he got obsessed with photography. A month later, he was selling drugs. He let himself be influenced by other people far too readily.'

His father had already disappeared from the scene when Michel Lelièvre joined humanity in Tamines on May 11, 1971. His mother is then only seventeen. She spent her childhood in orphanages and then fell into the arms of the wrong type of guy. A social worker took her baby to a foster family after ten months. Two years later, Benoit was born and was taken in by the same family. Good manners and Sunday church attendance are fundamental in this large Christian family. They overprotected us,' says Benoit. 'We had to wake up at this

time; at that time, you had to be home for dinner; at that time, lights off in the bedroom. There were rules for everything."

Michel is five years old when his mother marries her childhood sweetheart, Christian Lelièvre - who will give the two brothers a family name. 'They were happy at first,' recalls Josette Dumont. 'Mama was finally like other mums. But the mood quickly turned.' Michel and Benoit stay with the foster family. Christian Lelièvre spends most of his time drinking and gambling. After twelve years, he leaves the home to live with his parents in Saint-Servais. Not long after, on Christmas night in 1988, the old neighbour in Tamines, Edward Nadej, is robbed and slain with an axe. Christian Lelièvre was later found guilty of robbery by the Assize Court of Namur and received five years in prison.*2

The relationship between the father and stepsons is far from ideal. Michel is nine years old when Josette Dumont notices changes in his behaviour and reports these to the social assistant. 'He became obstinate, almost feral. His school results degraded. He lost faith in everyone. I thought it had to do with puberty. Later, I saw a connection between the parents' weekend visits. There was one weekend when something must have happened. For weeks after, they were behaving unruly. Neither of them felt like speaking about it. Many years later, Benoit made a comment about "the event" when I explained sexuality to him. He sighed, 'If only I could be seven years old again.'

Once the brothers came of age, they each went their separate ways. At the end of the eighties, Michel Lelièvre roams from one address to another in Sambreville and Namur. The police knew him as a petty, harmless drug addict. In 1990 and '91, he earned a living as a supervisor at a children's vacation camp and tried out as a handyman for a short stint. To pay for his increasingly expensive drug habit, Lelièvre started peddling cocaine on the streets. At the end of 1993, this landed him in jail for a year. The man he met in Vorst prison promised to set him straight. His name is Casper Flier. The Dutch homosexual has a thing for Lelièvre and offers him a job. After his release, Lelièvre takes a petrol station attendant job in Hastière, near Dinant. Flier brings him into contact with Michel Nihoul. Strangely enough, Lelièvre immediately gets on well with the bigmouth from Brussels. Lelièvre introduced Nihoul to his friends as "the man who can

arrange everything". He is less keen on Flier's advances, so he abandons his job at the petrol station and seeks his fortune in the auto parts scrap trade. The first person he runs into is Michael Diakostavrianos, a tyres and car wreck dealer.

Diakostavrianos knows a place where Lelièvre can stay. The house in Jemeppe-Sur-Sambre, where Diakosta keeps his tyres, is cluttered but spacious. The owner, Marc Dutroux, is a reasonable guy, says Diakostavrianos. It is the summer of 1995.

The house is indeed a mess, but Lelièvre contents himself with a thin mattress and a few shelves as a bedside table. In return, the landlord asks him if he can 'help with the odd job.' The indifference with which Lelièvre agrees to the arrangement reminds Dutroux of Jean Van Peteghem, an equally thoughtless good-for-nothing with whom he kidnapped children in the mid-1980s. Dutroux lends him money. Repayment is not Lelièvre's strong point. 'Regret? After each abduction, I regretted it,' Lelièvre says later. 'Dutroux always said I owed debts and had to repay them.' Lelièvre admits that the sum of money he owed Dutroux was negligible, and Dutroux's psychological dominance persuaded him each time. 'He obliged me to help with those kidnappings, just obliged me. At first, I didn't believe it. Even when I helped him to get An and Eefje into his vehicle, I didn't think it was actually happening. A little later that night, when we were on the side of the road with car trouble, I suggested we leave the girls there. No way, said Dutroux.

I did not have the guts to stand up to him (...). I didn't have the means to ask him for an explanation. I tried to talk about it with Sandra, a friend of mine, and my mother. I never got the opportunity.*3

Lelièvre and Diakostavrianos often travelled to Slovakia from June 1995 with a cargo of car tyres, presenting themselves as affluent Westerners. Dutroux accompanies them as frequently as he can. During the first trip, Lelièvre meets Vanda DUCKA, a poor secretary, in a bathhouse in Trenčín. Two weeks after their baby's birth, on June 22, 1996, they see each other for the last time. Lelièvre promises that he will return in August. On August 10, 1996, Vanda instead got to speak to him on the

phone for a while. He makes a nervous impression on her. Lelièvre describes the hours after the kidnapping of Laetitia Delhez. 'I went to La Bûche nightclub that night to let off steam. I was very nervous and took a shot.'⁴ His words come from the text of a police interrogation which will change the country. Michel Lelièvre's confession is the domino stone that will topple the Dutroux system. Lelièvre talks. The other detainees do not, at first.

Lelièvre claims not to know what happened to Laetitia that Friday night. During a subsequent interrogation, he clarifies that Dutroux's neighbours observed them as he unloaded the sleeping girl from the car and carried her inside. Dutroux had wrapped her in a blanket. 'I saw them looking at us and said she was drunk.' While driving to Marcinelle, he remembers Dutroux telling him a few things. 'He said that he was not the only one who did this sort of thing. And he also said that he always acted on an order.'⁵

On the evening of August 15, posters of missing children in Kain and Bertrix fuelled bonfires. People come out into the streets, trying to catch a glimpse of the children the community thought they had lost. Marc Dutroux is also enjoying himself, albeit in an interrogation room in Marche-en-Famenne. It is 9:30 pm. A few hours earlier, he spoke his historic words: 'I will give you two girls.' The liberation took place on his terms. Dutroux entered his basement before the police, opened the hatch and triumphantly accepted the embraces of the traumatised children.

Why? 'I wanted to create a life for myself. The idea grew after my last release from prison. I could no longer live in society as it is. It is the fault of others that I became like this. It was a choice between possessing a girl or suicide (...). I confessed and showed you the hiding place because I did not want the girls to suffer.'⁶

If one examines the interrogation texts of those first days, one can see a calculated Dutroux speculating on his predicament. He knows by heart those parts of the Belgian Criminal Code that concern him. He wants to get away with a double count of kidnapping, not murder. That night, Gendarme Demoulin asks him who 'Julie' is. Dutroux sticks to his guns. 'Sabine was feeling lonely. She wanted company and talked to

me constantly about her classmate. The girl's name was Julie Lejeune.

Hence.' grins Dutroux. The word Julie, he knows, was written down by Julie Lejeune with a marker on a cage wall in his Marcinelle house. The investigators pause their interrogation to check some items. They discover that Sabine Dardenne did indeed have a friend in her class who happened to have the same name as Melissa Russo's fellow victim. At 9:55 pm, Demoulin and his colleague return. Dutroux used the break in the interrogation to consider his position. He has never spoken to Lelièvre about Julie and Melissa but considers him capable of confessing everything all at once. Dutroux thinks he sees a way out.

If you try to put yourself in the mind of Dutroux with hindsight, it becomes immediately apparent that Michel Lelièvre must be innocent of the kidnapping of Julie and Melissa. That night, Dutroux voluntarily confessed to kidnapping An Marchal and Eefje Lambrecks, not Julie and Melissa's.*7 It appears that Lelièvre can only pose a risk to An and Eefje. The 'confession' is almost funny: 'I went to Ostend with Lelièvre last year. He had told me that he was in contact with a network that procured girls for prostitution. They paid a hundred thousand Belgian francs per girl. We then left with the Citroën CX but ran into car trouble (...). A week later, we returned. Two girls were hitchhiking, and we took them. We drugged them with sleeping tablets. Lelièvre stopped at a phone booth and called someone; he didn't disclose to whom he spoke. We took the girls to the Route de Philippeville. Lelièvre then put the girls in the Ford Sierra and drove off. He paid me the next day.*8

The detectives are sceptical. It seems apparent that they have busted a gang of child abductors. Nonetheless, with the world's best will, they cannot picture a leader in Michel Lelièvre. Gang leaders like Dutroux usually don't talk; they are talked into a confession.

When Michel Lelièvre recounts his story about Sabine Dardenne's kidnapping on the morning of August 16, he does so in a tone that suggests an amateurishly prepared car theft. 'Dutroux came to pick me up at my mother's,' says Lelièvre carelessly. 'The child was riding her bicycle to school. Dutroux grabbed her as we drove past her with the mobile home.' With

the same matter-of-factness, he explains the reason for Sabine's abduction. 'Dutroux later explained that she was an order and had already left.'*9

In the afternoon, Lelièvre is asked to look at photographs of An and Eefje. He needs little clarification. 'Those are the girls we kidnapped by the coast back then. I have no idea what became of them.' Michel Lelièvre seems to have understood long ago that there is no escape. His life as a free man has ended. He continues to talk. 'Dutroux wanted me to replace the man with whom he used to kidnap children before,' he explains. 'I think that person was Weinstein.' That evening, Lelièvre shares the story of the two Irishmen, as confirmed later by the investigation. The enquiry later revealed that before they spotted the two hitchhiking girls near the municipal swimming pool in Ostend.

Dutroux had noticed them earlier as passengers on the coastal tram. They were the last remaining passengers on the late tram service with Ostend as its final stop. The girls still had a long way to get home, so they entered the CX. They were already lying unconscious in the back seat before the vehicle joined the E40 towards Brussels. An hour later, the car broke down. In a parking lot along the E19 freeway, Dutroux woke up two Irishmen resting in their vehicle. They drove with him to Sars-la-Buissière, where they could spend the night. Dutroux returned with a Ford Sierra and picked up Lelièvre and the two girls.*10

It remained a mystery to Lelièvre for a long time why Dutroux took the insane risk of leaving his accomplice and the two victims along a highway in the dead of night. Yet he thinks he knows the answer: 'The morning after the abduction, Dutroux had an important appointment. He did not return until about five or six in the evening. The next day, I left for Slovakia. As for An and Eefje, Dutroux spoke of an order.' During the same interrogation, he also remarks: 'We took reconnaissance trips quite often.'*11

In the afternoon of Friday, August 16, the public had barely digested the shock from the double confessions about An and Eefje before additional news leaked from the interrogation of Marc Dutroux. Dutroux discovered that the investigators already knew everything about Julie and Melissa from the type

of questions fired at him. Still, he chooses the same tactic as during the previous evening's interrogation and once more insists the young junkie is the actual gang leader. 'I have known Michel Lelièvre for two years; he always claimed he could get anything he wanted. One day I asked him for a girl...of course, I wasn't serious. Okay, said Lelièvre, that will cost fifty thousand francs. Sometime later, I returned home and encountered Julie and Melissa there. Lelièvre stated he had kidnapped them with Bernard Weinstein. I didn't want them at all and still looked for a way to let them go. At first, they stayed upstairs in a room. Afterwards, I set up the basement.' Dutroux claims that Weinstein and Lelièvre abducted An and Eefje and that his part was limited to meeting them with the Ford Fiesta after their car trouble. 'I chained them to the bed in the upstairs bedroom', he adds. 'Their presence was problematic because Julie and Melissa were still in that house then. After a few days, Weinstein and Lelièvre came to pick up An and Eefje. There was a third man with them. I never saw the two girls again after that.'

A few hours after this interrogation, Marc Dutroux finds himself in Sars-la-Buissière in the spacious meadow behind Michèle Martin's house. Escorted by police officers, he passes the multiple car wrecks that haven't been towed away yet. The police keep the many assembled press news crews at a distance. 'It's here,' says Dutroux, pointing to a spot at the very back of the meadow. During his previous hearing, a BOB officer cornered Dutroux and pressured him. Wasn't he arrested before by the Charleroi police on December 6, 1995, for some hostage-taking situation? And who took care of Julie and Melissa during his captivity? 'We did indeed have to find a solution for Julie and Melissa,' Dutroux replied.

'Weinstein saw only one: kill them both. I did not want that. That is why I administered Weinstein some Rohypnol and buried him alive (...). The idea was that Lelièvre would bring the children food. I had given him fifty thousand Belgian francs for that purpose. When I came out of prison, Julie and Melissa were still alive, but they were in terrible shape. Julie died after a few hours, Melissa four or five days later (...). I buried them in Sars-la-Buissière, and I am willing to show the site where the three bodies are buried.'*12

When Dutroux points out the burial site of Julie Lejeune, Melissa Russo and Bernard Weinstein the following Saturday, he does so with a casual, could-not-care-less hand gesture. He is more focused on the crane operator than the pit being dug. The digger machine happens to be Dutroux's prize pony. Dutroux intimates that the crane operator is rubbish at operating his machine, joking: 'He is about to fall into the pit himself.' The observing investigating magistrates Jean-Marc Connerotte and Martine Doutrève stood in astonishment when Dutroux proposed to do the digging himself: 'If he carries on like this, we'll still be here tomorrow.'

That evening, Dutroux gets beaten up in prison by some fellow inmates. He subsequently criticised the court for not protecting him sufficiently and refused further cooperation. His spouse, Michèle Martin, for her part, continued to chase after the facts during her interrogations. Sabine and Laetitia? She can't or won't believe that. A concealed hiding place in the basement? She knew nothing about that. Julie and Melissa? Not in the know. Three bodies in her garden? Unbelievable. The one thing she can tell her interrogators from the Judiciary Police in Arlon - but they already know that by now - is that her husband 'had a lot of contact with a certain Jean-Michel from Brussels in the past week.'¹³ The named Michel Nihoul was arrested on Friday, August 16, in his view, a mistake.

And Michel Lelièvre? He talks. The subject of Weinstein is raised. 'He had the same preference for girls as Dutroux,' says Lelièvre. He remembers how the three of them had listened to a broadcast on the commercial radio station Fun Radio one day. A young girl was talking about her relationship with an older man. 'It struck me that Weinstein was telling the others to shut up and listen to the broadcast. Dutroux had then remarked that Weinstein 'liked little girls.'¹⁴ Although Lelièvre must have known by then that the Frenchman was dead (and therefore could have easily blamed Weinstein for the facts), he clears him of all blame for the kidnapping of An and Eefje. 'That was Dutroux and me.' He vehemently denies any involvement in the abduction of Julie and Melissa. He then goes on about An and Eefje: 'Dutroux told me later that he had taken the two girls to where they were supposed to be. I understood from that that it was about the person who had placed the order.'¹⁵

Lelièvre had also overheard another conversation about Laetitia from which he gathered that she too had been placed as 'an order.' Three days after the abduction, just before his arrest, Dutroux told him that 'the job's done'.*16 For Michel Lelièvre, it is apparent that he was only a tiny, insignificant link in a criminal trade network involving children and adult women.

While we were looking for girls, Dutroux explained to me that they had to meet certain characteristics,' Lelièvre states on August 19. 'He said he had asked Nihoul if he knew of places in Belgium where they could put the girls to work. Nihoul had replied yes. They could bring the girls over from Slovakia (...). Shortly after the abduction of An and Eefje, a man with an old model Mercedes 190 arrived in Sars-la-Buissière. Dutroux then told me that the person who placed the order had come to scrutinise the girls but was uninterested in them. Dutroux feared this person. He still owed that man money. I saw An and Eefje after that man's visit. They were naked. They can't escape that way, Dutroux said. I saw how he made one of them clean tiles in his house in Marcinelle.'*17

Two days later, Lelièvre has more recollections of An and Eefje. 'It was Dutroux himself who undressed them,' he says. The chains and the locks he used to tie them up were new. The day before I left for Slovakia, I saw An and Eefje in Marcinelle. Dutroux suggested to me that I rape one of them. Because, he said, when you come back, they will probably not be there anymore.*18 Indeed, Lelièvre never saw the two girls from Hasselt again after that.

August 22, 1996. Michel Lelièvre talks about Sabine Dardenne. Marc Dutroux was furious when he, Lelièvre, so nearly forgot to take Sabine's bicycle when they kidnapped her. 'He worked out an entire scenario to make her believe that her parents did not want to pay the ransom and that his boss wanted to kill her. Dutroux would play the role of her protector. I did not play along with that game. I saw the girl crying (...). Dutroux said afterwards that she was the daughter of a police officer of the Gendarmerie. He explained that he conditioned the girls to be obedient and submissive once they got to the customers.'*19

Sabine Dardenne cannot remember ever seeing anyone but Marc Dutroux. The girl was doing amazingly well during her August 20, 1996 interrogation. On Tuesday, May 28, 1996,

she left home in Kain on her bike at 7:20 am. It was still dark outside; the street was poorly lit. She was dragged into a van. A man with a moustache tried to sedate her with pills and forced some drops into her mouth. It didn't work. She did not swallow and was still awake when they arrived in Marcinelle around 10:30 am. She was pushed into an iron coffer and brought inside. Dutroux opened the coffer on the second floor and told her to undress. She was chained to a bed and stayed in a room for several days. 'Then he told me that my parents had refused to pay the ransom and therefore his boss had ordered him to kill me. He promised that he would hide me instead. He took me to the basement.' She was only allowed out when he was there. She had stayed in the cellar for eight days straight on one occasion. If Dutroux was there, they ate together, and he forced her to watch a porn movie with him. Dutroux also made her clean the house. 'Not in the basement; it was filthy down there,' Sabine points out. No cleaning ever got done down there (...)

'He told me the boss also had children and was 'richer than a minister.' He also told me that he owned seven houses guarded by dogs and had been part of the gang for a long time.'*20

Sabine Dardenne meticulously guides the investigators through her diary that she had kept in Dutroux's basement. Dutroux never noticed that she used crosses and asterisks to denote the days she was abused. She also used code letters to keep track of his attendance and absences in Marcinelle. P stands for "parti" (gone), R for "retour" (return). These entries can count as evidence. 'One day, he came to fetch me. He took me to the room on the second floor and showed me Laetitia. He had her chained to the bed by one foot. She was asleep. A little later, he commanded her to bathe with him.' Laetitia - Sabine remembers- was transferred to the basement only on August 12, three days after her abduction. When the interrogators ask Sabine Dardenne which medicines Dutroux made her take during that period of two and a half months, her answer is again quite detailed as she had memorised and was able to write down the names of the pharmaceuticals: Haldol, Fru-Zepam, Mycolog, Neutacetim and a bunch of pills whose names she doesn't know.*21 Haldol has the same effects as

Rohypnol. In the United States, it is a drug 'in fashion'. The victim can't recall anything about what happened to them.

On Saturday, August 23, Michel Lelièvre clams up. He makes a short statement 'outside of procedure'. This way, he can prevent the other detainees or their lawyers from knowing or viewing his account. 'I fear for my life if Nihoul discovers what I am declaring about him,' says Lelièvre. He has said that if I should turn him in, "they" will know where & when to find me. With Nihoul, the principle of service and counter service is vital. A few days earlier, he still identified Nihoul as the man who ordered the kidnapping of the children, now suddenly, everything sounds different: 'We were allowed to repair his car, but that was part of a deal in which we had to find girls in Slovakia.'²² After that day, Michel Lelièvre is never again the talkative man he used to be. On August 29, the BOB interrogators tried again. 'Nihoul threatened me,' Lelièvre says again. During this interrogation, he goes through twists and turns, talking about all possible suspicious activities by and with Nihoul, but no longer does he mention kidnapped children. However, in his zeal, he provides the investigators with a piece of information that makes many people's ears prick up: 'On August 10th, Nihoul gave me ten thousand Ecstasy pills, at 80 francs each.'²³ That is a day after the abduction of Laetitia. However, in the same breath, Lelièvre adds that the drugs were compensation for fixing Michel Nihoul's car. So, there is no more connection with child abductions. Because now it suddenly became clear to him that when Nihoul spoke with Dutroux about 'girls', it was not about children, but about Eastern European prostitutes: 'It was about adult girls with a passport. Nihoul insisted on the girls. He would pay 50,000 francs per girl. But before it worked out, we were arrested.'²⁴

The investigators are getting more interested in the Dutroux gang's ties to Eastern Europe by the day. Prosecutor Michel Bourlet has publicly expressed his hope of finding An and Eefje alive.²⁵ From Dutroux's and Lelièvre's vague statements on the subject, detectives infer that these girls may have ended up in a prostitution network in the Eastern Bloc. At the end of August, a rogatory commission was sent to investigate, and they searched the red light districts of Bratislava, but it soon

became apparent that this was nonsensical. Why would someone in Flanders kidnap teenage girls and deliver them in a country where adolescent prostitution is regrettably already rampant?

On September 3rd, the Dutroux case causes a third shock to the nation. The remains of An and Eefje are discovered under a concrete floor in the rue Daubresse in Jumet. The investigators believe that Lelièvre had tried to deliver them false hope and return their focus to Marc Dutroux. He is talking again, playing his game. Now that Lelièvre has been neutralised as a credible witness, Dutroux can resume his role as the investigation's de facto leader. 'An and Eefje stayed in Marcinelle for three weeks,' says Marc Dutroux. 'There was no question of an order. After the kidnapping, they never left Marcinelle. Until Weinstein came to pick them up, he wanted to put them into the network. Later, I found out that he had killed them. Weinstein had told me he had no other choice.'

*26

And so begins the Great Dutroux Show; Bernard Weinstein cannot defend his honour from his grave. Regardless, material indications allow us to cast doubt on Dutroux's claims. On August 16, during a search in his house in Sars-la-Buissière, hairs from the two girls from Limburg (An & Eefje) are found in a car wreck.*27 It is a black Chevy van registered to a certain Diakostavrianos.*28

Is it possible that this car was used to transport the girls, either at the time of their abduction or afterwards? No, claim Diakostavrianos and Dutroux. The Chevy van had been rusting away in Sars since 1994. The Dutroux's neighbour's son, Olivier Baudson, can confirm that. Other wrecks corral the Chevy van and could not have been moved or driven in the summer of 1995. Since the Baudsons were in a permanent territorial dispute with Dutroux, they would undoubtedly have noticed the car's slightest movement.*29. So how did the hairs of An and Eefje end up in the Chevy van? 'I wouldn't know,' says Dutroux. 'I know that Danny, who helped renovate the house in Sars, slept in that car for several weeks. Maybe Michèle Martin (Dutroux' wife) did Danny's laundry, which got mixed up with the other laundry.*30 Anything is possible.

On the night of An and Eefje's abduction, a witness in Ostend did signal the strange driving behaviour of a Chevrolet Dodge, which looks a lot like a Chevy van.*31 Neither Dutroux nor Diakostavrianos reacted surprised. Diakostavrianos confessed that the car had not been driven since mid-1994, and the gearbox was broken.

That's why the vehicle was at Dutroux'*32. In mid-November, two expert reports are put in front of Diakostavrianos. The first shows that it is now scientifically proven that the hair belongs to An and Eefje. The second report demonstrates that the Chevy van had been on the road months ago. Moreover, a witness in Lodelinsart insisted that without a shadow of a doubt, he saw Diakostavrianos drive the vehicle at the end of 1995. I doubt the capacities of your car expert', Diakostavrianos replies.*33. At the beginning of 1997, the investigators found an invoice from 9 January 1991 for fitting a new gearbox in the Chevy van in question.*34. A clumsy driver can succeed in destroying a gearbox in four years, but it is unlikely.

And then? Nothing more. The investigation into the hair in the Chevyvan is stuck on a discrepancy between the material evidence and the denials by those involved. Later in the affair, when investigating judge Jacques Langlois took the helm from Connerotte, the Chevy van's story fades into oblivion and is forgotten. Diakostavrianos has been released. To this day, no one knows how the girls' hair got into the Chevy van.

Paul Marchal, An's father, is worried. On 25 November 1997, shortly after he had been given access to the judicial file on An and Eefje in Neufchâteau, he lashed out at Langlois via the press. According to Marchal, certain documents have disappeared from the file. From reading the entirety of the file, one can conclude 'that certain hypotheses about potential clients for the kidnapping of my daughter have not been fully investigated. He has also noticed the remarkable evolution in Lelièvre's statements. Paul Marchal wonders why the search for Dutroux's visitor, who moved around in an old Mercedes 190, was not pursued to a conclusion. As his only response to Marchal's allegations, Langlois claimed that his lawyer 'might not have looked in the right file.' Marchal, meanwhile, has

already made it clear to the judiciary that they will not see him at what will become -in his view- a farce of a jury trial of Marc Dutroux. Because there is more: at the end of August 1996, a constable of the Blankenberge police reports to the Neufchâteau investigators an informant who had witnessed An and Eefje being taken to a country house on the edge of the coastal village of Vlissegem, not far from Blankenberge, shortly after their kidnapping. This cottage had been briefly inhabited in the summer of 1995 by one Pierre B.*35. The farmhouse, which lies 200 meters from the road, hidden from view behind bushes, had been vacant since 1994. When investigative judge Connerotte ordered a search on 1 October 1996, the detectives discovered that in the summer of 1995, not only Pierre B. but also 'some French-speaking people' had stayed there, according to the neighbours, and had been operating a digger. They also found a balaclava, a military parka and a notebook containing a reference to Pierre B.*36.

A Blankenberge-based restaurant owner named L. owned the country house. The man has a friend whose name rings a bell in Neufchâteau: hotel manager Marcel M, also from Blankenberge. Marcel M is an acquaintance of Marc Dutroux. While searching Dutroux's home in Marcinelle on 24 August 1996, investigators discovered Marcel M.'s private telephone number.*37. The number is written down in a booklet that lists various addresses and telephone numbers in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Marcel M. is no stranger to the Justice Department either. Since mid-1996, he has been the subject of an investigation into trafficking in Brazilian women. Proof? None. The assumption that An and Eefje stayed in the country house in Vlissegem seems nonsensical since the two Irishmen who gave a lift to Dutroux on the night of 22 to 23 August 1995 were found and interrogated. But what happened to An and Eefje afterwards, nobody knows unless one has unconditional faith in Marc Dutroux's story.

NOTES:

1. Conversation with Benoit Lelievre, December 1996.
2. There is insufficient evidence for murder.

3. Interrogation of Michel Lelièvre, BOB Brussels, 13 November 1996, PV 116.213
4. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, P.O.B. Neufchâteau, August 15, 1996, PV 100.210 L166.
5. Interrogation of Michel Lelièvre, Neufchâteau EPO, August 19, 1996, PV 100.223 L160.
6. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, Marche-en-Famenne PDO, August 15, 1996, PV 100.204 L107.
7. The investigators in Neufchâteau already suspected him of having kidnapped Julie and Melissa only because two days earlier, BOB employee René Michaux had hurriedly come over from Charleroi with information about the later much-discussed Othello.
8. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, August 15, 1996, PV 100.225 L108.
9. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 16, 1996, PV 100.215.
10. This happened, as would appear later, at the E19 in Woutersbrakel. Dutroux accuses Lelièvre of raping one of the two girls in his absence. Lelièvre will permanently deny this indignantly.
11. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 16, 1996, PV 100.215.
12. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, August 16, 1996, PV 100.226 L106.
13. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GPP Arlon, August 17, 1996, PV 2.538.
14. Interrogation of Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 16, 1996, PV 100.218 L163.
15. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 17, 1996, PV 100.221 L162.
16. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 19, 1996, PV 100.223 L160.
17. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 19, 1996, PV 100.225 L159.
18. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 21, 1996, PV 100.234 L158.
19. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 22, 1996, PV 100.241 L157.
20. Interrogation Sabine Dardenne, BOB Neufchâteau, August 20, 1996, PV 100.236 L114.
21. It mainly concerns heavy narcotics.

22. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 23, 1996, report Z23.
23. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, 29 August 1996, BOB Neufchâteau, PV 2557 Z39.
24. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 29, 1996, PV 100.258 Z51.
25. At a particular moment, the hope is so great that the newspaper Het Belang van Limburg announces a 'special edition' at the end of August to report the two girls' liberation from Hasselt.
26. Interrogation Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, September 2, 1996, PV 100.214 L217.
27. Analysis by the National Institute of Criminalistics (NICC), contained in a report to BOB Neufchâteau, 8 November 1996, PV L3093.
28. Chevrolet Delivery van.
29. Interrogation of Olivier Baudson, GP Arlon, 26 November 1996, PV L3336.
30. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Brussels, 12 November 1996, PV 116.189.
31. Gendarmerie Ostend, 22 August 1996, PV 103.674.
32. Interrogation of Michael Diakostavrianos, BOB Neufchâteau, 4 November 1996, PV's 100.494 L3088 and 100.496 LR3088.
33. Interrogation Michael Diakostavrianos, BOB Neufchâteau, November 15, 1996, PV 100.525.
34. BOB Neufchâteau, January 30, 1997, PV 100.094.
35. Blankenberge police, 27 August 1996, PV 3.378.
36. BOB Brussels, October 1, 1996, PV 114.675.
37. BOB Brussels, 24 August 1996, PV 112.405

2. He said he starved the dog to make it more aggressive

Neighbour of Bernard Weinstein, September 1996

- Where did the facts take place?
- I sedated him in Marcinelle.
- How did you do that?
- I invited him to dinner. I made him sandwiches. I am trying to remember the filling. When he got sleepy, I fed him some more, this time whole tablets.
- Your answer is not entirely clear to us. Could you be more precise?
- As for the sandwiches, I know we had prepared these in Sars, but I don't know if it was those sandwiches that Weinstein ate.
- Who prepared the sandwiches in Sars?
- My wife.
- Who laced them with tablets?
- Me.
- What product was it?
- Rohypnol.
- Did you foresee killing Weinstein on his visit?
- 'Yes, I had first tried to talk him out of the idea of killing the girls.'*1 'But he began to argue the opposite.'
- How did you make the body disappear?
- Early in the morning, I threw it into the hole in the ground I had made earlier and filled it.
- Why was that hole there, and since when?
- I started practising with the digger and tried digging as deep as possible to test the machine. I dug that hole a few days before Weinstein's murder.
- How did you move the body?
- I brought him with the Fiesta, the car I had bought from him.
- Was he already dead?
- No, Rohypnol doesn't kill you.
- You waited all night. Was there no risk that he would wake up in the morning?
- No, I know the effect of Rohypnol.

- Have you tried to eliminate Weinstein before?
- No.
- Why did you choose that exact moment?
- Time was running out.*2

Marc Dutroux treats these interrogations as a game. To him, these represent a constant weighing up of possibilities, exploring escape routes, and sullenly rejecting any opposition to his narrative. Like an experienced chess player, he moves bishops and pawns with focus and purpose. In his case, he can play neither the king nor the queen but aims to downplay his role in the affair from a strictly penal point of view as much as possible. To illustrate, the above piece of dialogue appears in a September 19, 1996 interrogation. A month earlier, Dutroux was questioned about what happened to An and Eefje.

`Bernard Weinstein killed them and buried them in his hangar,' was his answer that day. 'He mentioned this to me in his last hours, shortly before I killed him.'*3. How odd for a sedated man to suddenly manage to speak, but there is little point in pointing out such evidence of contradiction to Dutroux. He picks up on his inconsistencies immediately and usually devises a plausible-sounding explanation. His accusations of Weinstein regarding An and Eefje came just hours before Dutroux's macabre one-person show in the rue Daubresse in Jumeau. Standing on the grave of An and Eefje, he pointed around him: `You should look there or there. Anyway, I don't know either. As I said, I wasn't there myself.

Bernard Weinstein was killed off with a sandwich. With pâté, his wife Michèle Martin specifies.*4. It is hard to think of a more ridiculous cause of death for a gangster with a record like his. The most enigmatic of all the main characters in the Dutroux saga met his death in the last days of November 1995.*5 Under twenty years ago, he was briefly declared public enemy number one in his country of origin.

On December 24, 1975, in Orsay, south of Paris, the missing gendarme André Levêque was thrown from a car. The previous day, in the town of Taverny, a few hundred kilometres away, Levêque had caught red-handed two crooks trying to steal a car. The thieves were heavily armed and managed to escape by dragging the young police officer into the car and holding him hostage. Levêque's safe return is the resolve of a

nationwide manhunt. On December 25, 1975, the two hostage-takers were spotted in a Parisian suburb. They planned to steal a Citroen 2CV belonging to two lumberjacks, but are caught in the act. The thieves shoot one of the lumberjacks in the leg and flee on foot into the vast forest. Four hundred policemen comb the woods but to no avail. The French press compares their actions to the movie villain Phantomas, who drew large theatre crowds then. A few days later, their identities are revealed. They are 26-year-old Patrick Dubouille and the three years younger but 'very dangerous' Bernard Weinstein.*6 The two men are part of a gang that has left a trail of car thefts and burglaries in Paris. Weinstein leaves behind a bizarre trademark. He has a thing for animals, seeming to take a morbid pleasure in torturing them to death. During the mad dash through France, he kills the guard dog of a garage owner. Elsewhere, he silences a noisy parrot with a welding torch.

February 11, 1976, marks Weinstein's arrest date, and Dubouille's capture follows shortly after. In February 1981, they appeared before the assize court of Val d'Oise for robberies, abduction and hostage-taking, attempted murder, and 'acts of violence'. The prosecution petitioned for life imprisonment for Weinstein and twenty years for Dubouille. The lawyers point out both children's unhappy childhoods. Weinstein receives a fifteen-year sentence, Dubouille twenty.

'He was such a polite boy, always willing to lend a hand,' laments neighbour Lips-Magotte. For three years, she was his neighbour in the rue Daubresse in Jumeau. One day in 1992, he moved into the empty wooden chalet across the street. Nobody in the neighbourhood had any idea as to his background. 'He wasn't very talkative, living in the shadow,' remembers Mrs Lips. During the day, the curtains were closed, but he went out around half past eleven every night. She fed his four chickens and Malinois Shepherd for two years because *Bernard* neglected them. She now regrets that. Eric, another neighbour, confronted him about the dog: 'I once asked him why he fed that dog so little.' 'He responded that he made the dog go hungry to turn it aggressive.'

Weinstein gave off a repulsive body odour, seeming to have a particular aversion to water and soap. In the rue Daubresse, they call him "the rat". He had barely moved in when his chalet is transformed into a garbage dump of scrap

metal, discarded refrigerators, old newspapers, porn mags and dirty mattresses. 'Any old trash left by the wayside, he took it and dragged in there,' regales Mrs Lips. Weinstein's mother came to stay with him in October 1995 to try and sort out the mess but gave up ten days later. For every pile of dirt or trash she had cleared up, a new one took its place nearly instantaneously.

'House search is impossible, first empty everything and demolish the chalet', states the official report on 22 August 1996 after one of the first cursory explorations of his domicile in the rue Daubresse. Later, police officers brought the output of Weinstein's house searches by truck to the gendarmerie barracks in Jumet, where the courtyard turns into a scrap heap of potential leads. A concrete mixer, a spelunking ladder, street plans, a stolen tachograph, videotapes, a newspaper clipping about Adolf Hitler, children's clothes... these represent a tiny sample from the thousands of objects. The investigators are temporarily hopeful that a scarf -supposedly from a scout group- would provide more clues about Weinstein's involvement in any other than the officially reported kidnappings.

A survey of all the scout groups in the country yields zero results.

Only when someone in the street has car trouble do they know where to find Weinstein. In stark contrast to the aversion of every dog, cat or guinea pig that picks up his odour, it is as if his presence has a conjuring effect on cars. He works miracles on them. Weinstein moved to Paris as an adolescent in the 1960s, where he mastered car burglary techniques as a street thug. Stealing a car took him a few seconds.

21 October 1983. At the prison in Melin, France, where Weinstein was residing, a letter arrives from Belgian professor Charles Schulman. He is the head of the urology department of the Erasmus Hospital in Anderlecht. In this letter, on hospital letterhead and addressed to the penitentiary administration, Schulman makes a case for Weinstein's parole. He promises a fellow psychiatrist will take him under his wing in Belgium.*7 Whether this plea assisted with his release or not is speculative, but the fact is that on November 6, 1985, after serving nearly two-thirds of his sentence, Weinstein was free. When Schulman was questioned in early 1997, he promptly

admitted that there had never been any psychological care in Belgium for Weinstein. He explains that he wrote the letter at the insistence of his spouse, who happens to be Bernard Weinstein's sister.

Nor can she add much to the tale of her brother, whom she had not seen in thirty years until 1985. Mireille Weinstein had been separated from Bernard when she was still in diapers in different adoption families since their father's death. She had learned through the press that he was in jail in France, which did not surprise her one bit. 'At fifteen, Bernard was already uncontrollable,' Mireille remembers. 'Then I moved to Belgium, and we lost sight of each other completely.'*8. It was, in fact, Bernard's lawyer who had tracked down his sister and determined that her husband's profession unlocked a new perspective. 'Yes, I felt that he deserved a second chance,' says Schulman.*9

On November 28, 1985, three weeks after his release, Bernard Weinstein arrived in Belgium. Mireille rushed to his aid. As of December 1, she arranged a job for him at the company Video Promotion owned by Schulman's brother Joseph. The company's main activity is copying videotapes and is located at Marconistraat 167 in Vorst (part of Brussels). The address is an abandoned factory building of a company called ACEC, which has been empty since 1976. Video Promotion converted a small section of the dilapidated building into a film studio. 'Weinstein worked there as a videotape copier on the night shift,' Joseph Schulman recalls but doesn't remember much else, ten years after the facts. 'He was a reclusive individual, always on his own, with an absolute disinterest in sex.' The former business manager has no idea whether Bernard Weinstein worked on his account outside his working hours. In any case, his 'own companies were never involved in pornography', says Schulman, but he still admitted that he liked to frequent the

Brussels "partouze" (swingers) scene in the 1970s.*10.

The mini imperium of video companies run by Joseph Schulman aroused investigators' interest in Neufchâteau for a

long time in early 1997. The same Schulman is also the managing director of the BVBA Audio Corporation, which in the 1980s ran a recording studio at 86 Avenue Molière in Uccle, the studio that Jean-Paul Raemaekers had already identified in 1995 as a place where paedophile movies had been recorded in the 1980s.*11 As if by coincidence, the same building was acquired after 1991 by the Brussels paediatrician Claude C.*12. He is the physician to whom Annie Bouty and Michel Nihoul took their children. Sometimes, the world is even smaller than one would dare to imagine. Barely released after his conviction for his involvement in the kidnapping of former Prime Minister Paul Vanden Boeynants, the Brussels ex-lawyer Michel Vander Elst was allowed to act as an advisor to the BVBA Audio Corporation from 1992 onwards.*13. However, public prosecutor Michel Bourlet strongly suspected in early 1997 that Vander Elst was the provider of an alibi (confirmed as false later on) for Michel Nihoul in the investigation into the kidnapping of Laetitia Delhez, and he is also mentioned several times in the subsidiary files of the Dutroux case.

At the beginning of 1997, eleven searches were carried out at the homes of the Schulman brothers, their business partners, the offices of their video companies and associated bank vaults. For one of the companies, the investigation reveals some evidence of fiscal fraud (via the bank KB Lux) but no trace of the suspected trade in pornography. Bernard Weinstein continued to work at Video Promotion for only one and a half years. From 1987 onwards, he plodded along as a mechanic from one temp job to the next. He subsequently started a small garage for motorcycles, which turned into a complete mess. A year later, he met the car dealer Gérard Pinon, who owned about twenty garages, depots and apartments in Charleroi and the surrounding area. Something sparks between the two men. Weinstein sets Pinon's house on fire - part of an insurance premium scam. He is attracted to the bohemian province of Hainaut's scrap metal and automobile swindlers' milieu and decides to move there. He first moved to take up domicile in Lodelinsart, ending up in rue Daubresse in January 1992. He bought the property for 1 million Belgian francs.

Bernard Weinstein was never rich. An analysis of his bank account revealed that from early 1993 until his premature

death in 1995, he lived on less than 10,000 Belgian francs a month (+/- 500£ in today's money).^{*14}

Notwithstanding, he manages to spend an impressive amount of cash. During one of the rue Daubresse house searches, the investigators stumbled upon an invoice for a series of purchases at the Makro (wholesale store) totalling 400,000 BEF. Mapping out the number of cars bought and sold is a hopeless task. 'It is clear that he had undeclared income,' the investigators conclude.

Little is known about how and when Weinstein and Dutroux met. Dutroux says they had known each other for many years - through Pinon - but only became friends in early 1994. 'Weinstein was his best friend,' Michèle Martin knows. 'Whenever the two were together, I was the fifth wheel on the wagon'^{*15}. Her testimony revealed that cars and weapons were their main common areas of interest. Later, she explained that they had devised the design of the hatch of the children's cage. There is little evidence of friendly feelings toward Weinstein in Dutroux's interrogation room. He portrays Weinstein as 'a scumbag with an impotence problem', who has the murder of An and Eefje on his conscience and tortured the cat, kidnapped Julie and Melissa, could never keep his hands off the girls and finally decided that they had better disappear. Weinstein is the perfect scapegoat for Dutroux.

On the night of November 4-5, 1995, gunshots resounded in the rue Daubresse in Jumet. The police observed a man running away in the darkness, later assumed to be Bernard Weinstein. As his chalet was the focus of the police hustle & bustle throughout the evening, this observation makes sense. The lead of an agitated teenage girl led the police to locate two young hoodlums in his house. They are bound with chains, drugged into oblivion and taken out by the police with stretchers. Once they woke up, their interrogations revealed a hostage situation linked to a dispute among car thieves. Pierre Rochow, one of the hostages, and his accomplice, Philippe Divers, stole a truck loaded with telephony cables from the firm Fabricom in Braine-l'Alleud -with the assistance of Dutroux and Weinstein- as the investigation subsequently revealed. After all, the thieves stashed the loot in a hangar rented by Michèle Martin on the car dealer Gérard Pinon's premises. He is friends with Dutroux, Weinstein and Georges

Zicot, an inspector with the Charleroi judicial police and a specialist in automobile burglaries. Pinon has made a killing from the finder's fees paid by insurance companies. He informs Zicot of the 'big fish' in his hangar. Zicot picks up the truck in person and parks it somewhere by the roadside. In his report on the 'truck discovery', he does not mention the hangar at all, "to protect his informant," he later professes.*16

The insurance company Royale Belge rewarded Pinon 150,000 Belgian francs for the recovered truck. When Dutroux and Weinstein discovered the vehicle's disappearance, they suspected Rochow and Philippe Divers. Dutroux subsequently hurried to Weinstein's chalet, who, in the meantime, had called the two rascals and politely asked them to 'drop by.' This event started the hostage situation. Even in their precarious predicament, the two youngsters insisted they knew nothing about the truck's whereabouts. Dutroux jumped in his car and left to pick up Rochow's girlfriend and draw her into the hostage situation. When they insisted that they 'knew nothing about that bloody truck', Dutroux forced them to ingest Rohypnol. While Weinstein guarded the sleeping hostages, Dutroux went out at night to look for the truck himself. At this point, things started to go amiss for the kidnapping crew. The girl, remaining untied, managed to avoid swallowing the tranquilliser Dutroux fed her. When she noticed Weinstein dozing off in a

comfy chair, she escaped and notified the police.

The description given to the police by Rochow's girlfriend leaves little doubt about the perpetrator's identity. She is talking about a certain Marc with a moustache and a lazy eye from Marcinelle. One of the other hostages manages to identify the street where he lives. Police Officers Huberland and Gonzalez identified Marc Dutroux as the main culprit on November 6, 1995.*17 Yet another month passes before the police make any moves to arrest him. To arrest Dutroux, they employ the municipal police's standard procedure to collect overdue fines such as unpaid parking tickets. They send an invitation by letter to the non-payer in question to visit the local police station. In the case of Dutroux, a month elapses

before the police decide to send such a letter, giving him all the time he requires to concoct a cover story.

On December 6, 1995, Marc Dutroux voluntarily presented himself at the Charleroi police station. Inspector De Windt interviewed him and Dutroux confidently assumed he would be able to return home in half an hour. He had bargained with Rochow and Divers and proffered them some money in exchange for their discretion about the kidnapping incident. But things go awry. De Windt gets one of the two to spill the beans during a subsequent confrontation with Dutroux. A day later, investigating judge Lorent puts Dutroux under formal arrest. He will remain in custody until March 20, 1996.*18 If we are to believe Dutroux, this event spells Julie and Melissa's death sentence because, at that moment, they are still in his cellar in Marcinelle and are left to starve from December 6th onwards.

There is scant certainty about the month's events leading up to Dutroux's arrest. One fact is that Bernard Weinstein was murdered. Following the night of the hostage-taking, the Frenchman first goes into hiding at Gérard Pinon's place for a few days.*19 On November 8, 1995, he is spotted at the counter of a BBL bank branch in the company of an elderly lady. It's his mother on a visit to Belgium because her son has gotten himself into trouble once again. That day, Weinstein cashed a French cashier's cheque for 636,000 francs.*20 This cheque will later turn up at Dutroux's house and, according to Dutroux's wife, Michèle Martin, prompted the motive for Weinstein's murder. A few days after the cash withdrawal, Dutroux and Weinstein visited Michel Nihoul and Annie Bouty in Brussels to ask them to arrange a false passport for Weinstein.*21 Weinstein must leave the country; that much is clear. However, he will never get near the Belgian/French border. Judging by Dutroux's testimony in mid-November, Weinstein got locked up in the children's cage that he helped construct. Dutroux admits to administering Weinstein a few daily drops of Haldol via the drinking water he left behind in the basement.*22 Until the day arrives when Michèle Martin fixes a pate sandwich.

Julie and Melissa's whereabouts when Weinstein was imprisoned in the basement are unknown. Perhaps they were

being kept on the upper floor of his house, but that would be a foolish thing to do for Dutroux. Since Divers and Rochow had seen him, he must have realised the genuine risk of a police house search. It seems hardly plausible that Dutroux knew in advance that the police would not bother him for another month, and a wholly incompetent police officer named René Michaux would eventually conduct the inevitable house search. In his house in Marcinelle, Dutroux did keep addresses of cafes in Charleroi where plainclothes police officers frequented and operated through tip-offs. Still, there is no guarantee that Dutroux knew some of them and might have benefitted from their information.*23

Dutroux was extremely busy in November 1995. He finds the time to take out a mutual loan with his wife of one million Belgian francs on November 9 for 'renovation work' on his house in Marcinelle, where Julie and Melissa are supposedly still locked up.*24 On November 22, Dutroux visits Michèle Martin at the maternity bed. While getting acquainted with his new daughter Céline, Dutroux callously informs his wife that he will take care of Weinstein'.*25 Marc Dutroux seems not to frequent his home much during this period. Were Julie and Melissa already dead by mid-November? Were they temporarily housed elsewhere? The hazy reconstruction of the absurd month of November 1995 lends credence to the many later witness statements that they have spotted Julie and/or Melissa someplace. These statements allow us to assume the appearance of many events that the public prosecutor in Neufchâteau could only speculate on.

The day after the hostage event in Jumet, Bruno Tagliaferro's body was discovered in Keumiée, near Sambreville in Namur. The young vehicle junk trader had also experienced some eventful weeks. It remains unclear whether this is related to his adoptive Italian family's issues or due to his contacts with Dutroux's regular accomplice in the automobile scam business, Michael Diakostavrianos. Tagliaferro stayed with his Italian family in Portugal for three weeks starting mid-October and returned to Belgium in a non-stop car journey 24 hours before his death. The Namur-based judicial doctor Servais seems not interested in any proper investigation, not even bothering to take a blood sample, draws up a "C3 form" to declare a "natural death" - Bruno Tagliaferro succumbed to a heart attack. Tagliaferro's

name was discovered among Diakostavrianos' belongings in late 1996.*26 This is not the only reason why investigating judge Jean-Marc Connerotte later had had the corpse of the unfortunate thirty-something exhumed. Connerotte interviewed a somewhat agitated blonde lady in his office in late August. Her name is Fabienne Jaupart, Bruno Tagliaferro's widow. She had been declaring far and wide since November '95 that her husband was murdered, but her statements were utterly ignored by the public prosecutor's office and the police in Namur. Since the Dutroux case erupted, the assassination of her husband was 'obvious' to her. She can remember as it was yesterday that one of the police officers first on the scene to establish Tagliaferro's death was Georges Zicot. Michael Diakostavrianos is no stranger to her at all. She states she noticed him in a leather suit, ready to attend an S&M party. She claimed that her husband was involved in a car deal potentially linked to Julie and Melissa's abduction. 'Bruno hid evidence of several sinister conversations in a suitcase. He knew he was going to die and even mentioned a specific day to me: the fifth.'*27 Depending on Jaupart's mood, she associates the contents of the suitcase with the other members of the Tagliaferro family -with whom she is obviously not on friendly terms -to a car that her husband had dismantled in the summer of 1995 and might have been used in the kidnapping of the two girls.*28

Jaupart also talks about a curious event with Michel Nihoul, whom she noticed in June 1996, along with Diakostavrianos in a green Mercedes parked in front of a gas station in Moignelée. She recounts this story later in mid-1997 when she is questioned by counsellor Etienne Marique, working for the Verwilghen Commission. She claims in this statement that Nihoul is a close acquaintance of the Tagliaferro family and once bought a VW Golf from her husband. She declared that the double encounter at the gas station occurred on June 25, 1996. 'I needed to settle an issue with Diakostavrianos concerning the inventory made after Bruno's death.' 'Bruno delivered car tyres to Diakostavrianos. I demanded that he return these tyres to me. He then drew up a paper dated June 22, 1996. Michel Nihoul insisted on this backdating of the document sitting in the driver's seat when I was discussing it with Diakostavrianos. He did not want to

change the date. '29 June 25, 1995, marked the day after the kidnapping of Julie and Melissa.

Jaupart's account incites some extreme reactions. She said she herself had been a victim of sexual abuse from the age of ten. Bruno was her God and had vowed to avenge her. In one of her statements, she talks about 'hunting parties' he witnessed during his military service with the paratroopers in Flawinnes, reminiscent of what these same paratroopers carried out many years later during a UN mission in Somalia. As with all succeeding witnesses, the willingness to listen to the slightly paranoid woman is short-lived. Connerotte is still able to have her husband's body exhumed. Specialists from the FBI could corroborate Jaupart's account on that point; her husband had indeed been poisoned. By Dutroux? By his mates? With the dismissal of Connerotte, the enthusiasm to find out also disappeared.

From October 1997 onwards, the Liège Prosecutor General Anne Thily announced that the 87/96 file (automobile scam) could not remain in Neufchâteau. She decided that the voluminous dossier of child murders should not be unnecessarily burdened with the tangle of automobile, drug and arms trafficking in the environment of the Hainaut criminal handymen. Thily argues that there is a real risk that 'the jury at the assize trial would no longer understand the case'. She orders the dossier to be 'separated' from the primary investigation into the abductions.

In May 1998, the so-called "case disassociation" became a hard fact. Every dossier not directly related to the child murders was 'disassociated'. Part of the dossier 87/96 is transferred to the Nivelles public prosecutor's office. The investigation into the Tagliaferro murder returned to the Namur district, where it had been assumed initially to be a completely innocuous case.

Only the investigation into the murder of Weinstein and the hostage situation of the three young folks remained in the hands of the Neufchâteau judiciary.

The parents of Julie Lejeune and Melissa Russo resisted the 'disassociation' until the last moment. They feel that there is too close a connection between the investigations into the child murders and the investigations into car scams. A lot of

leads were never adequately investigated', remains the opinion of Carine and Gino Russo, parents of Melissa, who in April '97 approached the public prosecutor of Neufchâteau with the news that a witness from the automobile scam had been murdered in Liège a few days earlier. The woman, whose body was dug up from the Meuse River, was a close friend of Pierre Rochow's father. Her statements would link Julie and Melissa's disappearance and the milieu surrounding the car scam. It is neither the first nor the last corpse. Just before Christmas 1998, Fabienne Jaupart is also found murdered.

NOTES:

1. Julie and Melissa
2. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, September 19, 1996, PV 100.212 L100.
3. Interrogation Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, August 26, 1996, PV 100.213 L1216.
4. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GPP Arlon, August 28, 1996, PV 2.555.
5. Dutroux himself mentioned this time, and it may correspond to reality. According to the invoice, Dutroux bought the excavator with which he dug the grave for Weinstein on November 24, 1995. He was arrested On December 5, 1995. Logically, Weinstein's date and time of death must have occurred between these dates.
6. Bernard Weinstein was born in Nantes on March 4, 1952.
7. Letter Charles Schulman, 21 October 1983, recovered by BOB Brussels, 27 November 1996, PV 117.538.
8. Interrogation of Mireille Weinstein, BOB Brussels, February 27, 1997, PV 150.481.
9. Interrogation of Charles Schulman, BOB Brussels, February 27, 1997, PV 150.397.
10. Schulman visited the Etterbeek private club La Piscine, at that time the Brussels Mecca of sex clubs. He says he never saw any minors there—interview of Joseph Schulman, 27 February 1997, BOB Brussels, PV 150.432.
11. Summary 'dossier Molière', Brussels police station, 10 February 1997, PV 150.080.
12. BOB Brussels, 10 February 1997, PV 150.080.
13. BOB Brussels, 26 March 1997, PV 150.928.
14. BOB Brussels report, 25 November 1996, PV 116.224.

15. Interview with Michèle Martin, Judiciary Police Arlon, 20 August 1996, report 2541.
16. In September 1996, the investigating judge, Jean-Marc Connerotte, saw things differently. He had Zicot arrested because he suspected he had protected Dutroux and Co.
17. This report shows that Inspector Philippe De Windt of the Charleroi police drew up PV SJ/896 one month later, on December 7, 1995.
18. The well-being of his newborn daughter Céline becomes the decisive element that allows Dutroux to regain his freedom so quickly. Given that he was sentenced to 13.5 years in prison in 1989 for the hostage-taking and sexual abuse of minors, it is at the very least curious that Dutroux does not have to serve the rest of his sentence. Drugging and chaining the three youths can hardly be seen as anything other than recidivism.
19. Five months after his arrest, Dutroux will also implicate Gérard Pinon in Weinstein's murder. He then says that Pinon helped him bury the corpse—interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Bastogne, January 11, 1997, PV L4174.
20. Two weeks earlier, Weinstein also withdrew 162,374 francs from his account.
21. Nihoul consults Bouty with Dutroux and Weinstein. Nihoul and Bouty admit this, but neither can remember the exact date. Nihoul stated he had a blank Portuguese passport in mind, some of which Bouty had already sold to Nigerian asylum seekers. Bouty remembers Dutroux and Weinstein as 'very dirty' and estimates she saw them for at least five minutes. Interrogation Annie Bouty, September 7, 1996, Gendarmerie Brussels, PV 10.451.
22. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Bastogne, January 11, 1997, PV L4174.
23. A search of premises, BOB Brussels, 24 August 1996, PV112.091.
24. BOB Brussels, 26 August 1996, PV 112.730.
25. On the same day, in Obaix, a village near Charleroi where Dutroux grew up, a girl was almost fatally assaulted. The car resembles Weinstein's, and Marc Dutroux remained the main suspect for a long time.

26. Conclusions of BOB Brussels, September 15, 1996, PV 113.897.
27. Interrogation of Fabienne Jaupart, Neufchâteau BOB, 9 September 1996, PV 100.360.
28. The documents allegedly refer to a Citroën AX. The Dutroux file later mentions a stolen Citroën BX.
29. Interrogation of Fabienne Jaupart, Counsellor Marique, June 5, 1997.

3. I wanted to go further, but an uncontrollable force prevented me from doing so.'

Michèle Martin, 28 august 1996

- Where did they stay?
- Early on, they were kept in the children's bedroom, in bunk beds.
- In what way did you ensure they stayed in the house?
- I explained to them that we had requested a ransom and that they had to stay here to avoid any problems (...).
- When were Julie and Melissa transferred to the cage?
- The first thing to be done was to construct the space for the cage. Nothing was ready yet except for the cage entry. That was ready for use. I made a wooden frame for a bed. I installed two benches, a folding table with a colour TV, and a Sega Megadrive with some game cassettes. I hid the power supply behind the ventilation grille in the ceiling, which I also built. Bernard Weinstein

designed the metal rack and hatch in the middle. I installed electrical outlets and lighting. The lighting consisted of a neon tube, a sixty or one-hundred-watt bulb, and one twenty-five-watt bulb. I installed a small wall cabinet to the left of the folding table, with a mirror on top and the two fittings for the lamps - with a switch. I painted it yellow. That's a cheerful colour. That's why I chose yellow, by the way. It took a week to complete the job.

- Were the girls tied up during that time?
- I tied the girls' bodies only after they had died.
- How often did Bernard Weinstein visit to look after the girls?
- Never.
- Then what motivated him to have 'young girls at his disposal'?
- He contented himself to play with them. Besides, he was angry because of the situation I had forced upon him. He felt that this situation was not beneficial.
- So, what interest did he have?
- His only interest was the same as mine. The girls would grow up and become attached to us. We agreed that Julie was for me and Melissa was for him.
- How long did you think you would have to wait?
- At least until they hit puberty.
- Why?
- Because you can't do anything with a little girl.
- What did you plan to do with them once they reached puberty?
- We would have lived an everyday life like a couple. In my opinion, we wouldn't have to use any violence at all. That wasn't my intention.
- And what of Weinstein?
- He was ambiguous. He could be entirely amicable, but sometimes, he relished hurting others, making them suffer. He spent a lot of time torturing my cat.
- How much did he have to pay you for 'maintaining' Melissa?
- One thousand francs a week, all-inclusive. But he soon tired of it. After approximately a few weeks, two months, he wanted the girls to disappear. I think he tried to kill them. He said he was willing to do it. I proposed that I'd

take care of everything but didn't want them out of the way.

- How exactly did he want them out of the way?
- I have no idea. I never even asked myself that question.*1

One of the few people who understand the case's uniqueness from the outset is Jean-Marc Connerotte. At the start of his investigation, he contacted a specific FBI unit in Quantico, Virginia; the Child Abduction and Serial Killer Unit, which specialises in creating offender profiles, the development of applied interrogation techniques, and interpretation of the subliminal signalling by this type of criminal. On the other side of the ocean, only a little data was available on Dutroux, but specific rules of thumb always apply. 'Be suspicious of any statement by Dutroux that seems to play to his advantage,' the FBI unit advises the Neufchâteau investigators. The people of the FBI don't quite understand something about the little moustachioed Belgian. He is atypical,' says special agent Gregg McCrary. It occasionally happens for this kind of criminal to operate with servile accomplices, but there are usually just one or two.

In Dutroux's case, the investigators already know about Michèle Martin, Michel Lelièvre and Bernard Weinstein. Moreover, Dutroux went a lot further in his efforts to recruit other accomplices, such as Claude Thirault, asking him unabashedly whether he wanted to earn some extra money by helping him kidnap a child, a behavioural element which the FBI could not frame in any existing criminal profile.

Interrogating someone like Dutroux is exhausting, as McCrary explains to a Belgian journalist during a telephone interview. The trick is, as an interrogator, to switch off one's personal feelings. Appealing to the perpetrator's conscience is not a productive tactic with this type of offender. They don't have those feelings. When I talk to a psychopath, I pretend to be slightly less intelligent than he is. I want to understand him, but I need his help to explain it to me. It gives him the impression that he controls the situation. It also doesn't hurt to show admiration for how he outsmarted everyone. The intent is to attempt to manipulate the manipulator.'

Even on this point, there is something amiss with the Dutroux phenomenon. The kidnapping of Laetitia Delhez, with

a van that made an awful lot of noise because of a defective muffler, can hardly be considered highly cunning. The engine trouble during the kidnapping of An and Eefje didn't exactly show any thorough preparation from the kidnappers. McCrary believes this is not so surprising after all. After a while, a personality like his starts to feel untouchable. The fact that the police have already put him through his paces will only boost his confidence.

Long before the judicial inquiry revealed this, McCrary deemed it unlikely that Dutroux would have entrusted others with the care of Julie and Melissa in late 1995, following his arrest. That would be equivalent to giving up control. We always investigate first how the offender disposes of the bodies. In the case of an 'organised' offender, which Dutroux seems to be, he will do the utmost to maintain control of the situation, even after the victims' deaths. So, he does not just dump them somewhere by the roadside but buries them in his own house.*2

Soliciting American specialist advice only occurs in the first weeks of the investigation, much like the security measures put in place during the first appearances of Dutroux, Nihoul, Lelièvre, and Martin before the court chambers. Initially, Neufchâteau is swarming with police officers, and the suspects are issued with bulletproof vests. As the months pass, normalcy sets in - business as usual. Police officers with a great deal of experience with bank robberies and opportunistic crookery but not so much with child trafficking almost intuitively look for anything they can fit into their framework of expertise during the interrogations and perspectives they can insert into their real-world experiences. They seek to grasp the substance of this matter- just like the rest of the population confronted for the first time with this type of "reality". Michèle Martin was eventually allowed to enter the courthouse in Neufchâteau uncuffed. Later, even Marc Dutroux was left uncuffed, producing its own consequences later on.

The judicial police of Arlon begin the demystification of what is first considered as a 'criminal network'. Inspector Masson oversees what should be regarded as the 'big mystery'. Yet after only a few weeks, this police officer proclaims to anyone within earshot that the entire Dutroux case is 'utterly

overrated'. The task of Masson and his colleagues is to interrogate Michèle Martin. She has been a marionette of Dutroux for fifteen years, and since her husband can no longer control her, she turns into a solitary heap of misery. Her introduction to prison life hasn't been too kind to her, having been beaten up by fellow inmates in her first week of stay. Regardless, the thrashings and maledictions don't seem to affect her much. The only thoughts to occupy Martin's mind are the letters from her children or other sources, which -even for a moment- melancholically transport her back to the days of a mere chaotic household. The investigation crew in Arlon will gradually discover that Michèle Martin is pliant to increased cooperation in exchange for a pair of knitting needles. Is she crafty or just plain dumb? Masson and his colleagues stick to dumb.

'She did everything for that man,' attests a neighbour from the residential area of Chenois-Waterloo. She gave up her lamb chop at the dinner table to her husband because his hunger wasn't satisfied. 'Then she had no dinner at all.' This pensioner saw Michèle Martin, born on January 15th, 1960, grow up as the quiet girl next door who struggled to get out from under her mother's skirts. Her father died in a traffic accident when she was six years old. Michèle was never allowed to leave the house. She is, however, an exemplary student. When Michèle Martin takes possession of her teacher's diploma, she has not yet seen much of the world. Until she met Dutroux,' says the neighbour. 'He was her first great love. Then she finally cut the umbilical cord to her mum.'

The Dutroux-Martin household becomes indescribable disarray: stacks of dirty dishes, food scraps in every corner, clothes lying around. But the furniture is new and expensive: leather sofas, hi-fi systems, expensive television sets. Dutroux is a thief. Martin had always been aware of that reality. He came home on one occasion with a gigantic shipment of pralines, a raid's loot on a praline factory, accomplished with the aid of one Patrice Charbonnier. With the same Charbonnier, one of the gang leaders who committed several robberies of money transports in the nineties, Dutroux discovers the inspiration for constructing the child cages.*3 Charbonnier was a school friend of Dutroux. They later reacquainted in a motorcycle gang based near Nivelles. He stands as a model for the kind of characters that Martin starts

to get drawn to. She adapts to the role. 'When Michèle got behind the wheel, even the best driver was her subordinate,' says her neighbour across the street in Waterloo. 'Delivery trucks, small vans, she manoeuvred these with total confidence, with her head straight and full concentration on the rear-view mirror. Outside of a car, Martin seemed a quiet, characterless woman. Behind the wheel, she transformed into a champion.'

She is the van driver in which Dutroux and Jean Van Peteghem restrained the children in the back seat in the 1980s. She guards them while Dutroux rents video material around the corner. She watches with indifference as Dutroux tapes the eyes of the crying girls and forces them to pose naked. She goes grocery shopping while Dutroux rapes them.

During the first judicial inquiry, Michèle Martin remains stubbornly silent for months. When she finally starts to confess, the word is that she stays quiet all this time for fear of Dutroux. 'I am the victim of my naiveté, of my good heart, of the beatings I received,' she laments. Naive? Through her psychiatrist, the aged doctor Emile Dumont from Uccle, she later sought a failed attempt to have herself declared insane. Psychiatric reports quoted during the trial could not define her at any stage as being in a retarded or disturbed or another psychotic state of mind. Shortly before the onset of the trial, she attempts a retraction of her confessions, claiming her interrogators threatened her. That her lawyer also failed to keep her out of the courtroom was not her fault but his. 'He is taking advantage of my desperation,' she writes to her mother. On November 4th, 1988, the Charleroi correctional court sentenced Michèle Martin to three years of effective imprisonment. Her active involvement in two abductions is deemed proven beyond doubt. The sentence is quite lenient. Nevertheless, she appeals through the advice of Dutroux, who is pushing for an acquittal - he wants her to insist, like him, that the entire affair is based on a miscarriage of justice.

Throughout their detentions, Dutroux and Martin continue to write and encourage each other incessantly, aligning their versions of the facts and confirming their mutual belief that the world is unjust. Michèle Martin gives her husband tips on how to misdirect the psychiatrists effectively. His return advice does her no good; the Court of Appeals in Mons increased her sentence to a five-year prison sentence on

April 27th, 1989, of which she will serve only two years. Her life between the cell walls is dominated by what she pretends to be: a good mother who misses her children deeply. Michèle Martin was released early in May 1991. "To break free from the suffocating grip of Dutroux," the erstwhile reports state. Unfortunately, I failed, Michèle Martin admitted five years later.

There was a time, Michèle Martin tells the Arlon judicial police investigators, that Marc made love to me with a condom. Afterwards, he would tie the condom with a knot and order her to carry it around in her vagina for two days. Then Dutroux punctured it with a needle and reinserted into her womb. He had read in a popular science magazine that 'female' sperm survived longer than male sperm. He desperately wanted a daughter, a wish granted to him on November 24th 1995, when Céline was born. 'At that time, he admitted he planned to commit incest on her at some later point,' Martin recounts in mid-1997. 'I assured him that I would kill him if he ever did that.'

Since her first pregnancy with her son Frédéric, Martin had known that Dutroux did not like male offspring. On the way to the maternity home, he made her run, and in the weeks before giving birth, he forced her to perform hard labour on a construction site. Is there any truth to this story? Only Dutroux and Martin know. What is certain is that after a few months, the Arlon investigators no longer see her as a gang member but as a victim.

In the first days following her arrest in August 1996, Michèle Martin beats Dutroux and Lelièvre in the contest of staying quiet. 'I can't believe this; the mobile home was broken', she retorts when the investigators report to her on Wednesday, August 14th, that Dutroux has admitted to picking up Laetitia Delhez in his car the previous Friday.*4 When questioned that same day about her

whereabouts that Friday, Martin had prepared an alibi so convincing that it practically looked pre-planned: she had taken the kids to Dinant, a ticket in her pocket stamped, marking the date and time of their visit to the cable car.*5 'Well, I didn't know about the children's cage', she replied when she was told the evening of August 15th that Sabine and

Laetitia had been freed from this cage.*6 'I thought he had bought that digger to level the terrain in Sars,' she stated on August 18th, one day after discovering Julie and Melissa's bodies.*7 Two days later, the investigators asked a few more questions about the children's cage. She knew that Dutroux and Weinstein were building something in the basement, but not exactly what. 'During the work, they did not allow me to enter the basement.'*8

During those first two weeks, Michèle Martin rigorously sticks to the routine Dutroux ordered her to do on the previous occasion: deny until she drops dead. This tactic lasts until Wednesday, August 28th, 1996. 'It is better to clean the slate', Michèle Martin states at the beginning of this interrogation. August 28th is the starting point of the first battle of faith among investigators. Is she genuinely being sincere, or is what follows only phase two of the Dutroux strategy? Isn't it a coincidence that this coincides almost simultaneously with Lelièvre's testimonies ending abruptly?

That day, Michèle Martin distances herself from her god, Dutroux. She reveals that they were growing apart after the kidnapping of Julie and Melissa. Afterwards, sexual intercourse had finished between them. He no longer wanted to, nor did she. 'Marc informed me of six kidnappings that he carried out over about a year. In chronological order, these are the abductions of Julie and Melissa, An and Eefje, Sabine and ultimately Laetitia (...). As for the kidnapping of Julie and Melissa, if my memory serves me well, it must have been in mid-1995 or a little later that Marc spoke to me about it. I had heard about their disappearance on the radio but had not asked him about it. He explained to me that he had abducted them with Weinstein's aid in a stolen vehicle. He never provided any further details. I was thrown off guard the first time he mentioned it. I wondered if he was telling the truth or merely bluffing. I remember asking him what he wanted to do with them, especially why he kidnapped them. He said they were for him (...). I am pretty sure, based on what Marc told me, that the basement was not yet finished by the time he kidnapped Julie and Melissa. Marc told me initially that he kept them in a top-floor room. In my view, it was Bernard and my husband who completed the basement storage room. Bernard was there each time I went to Marcinelle in those hot summer months of 1995. I know he was an excellent

handyman. I was stunned by what he told me. I remember how he told me one day -the same day or later; I cannot recall exactly- that Julie and Melissa were listening to the radio and playing, having fun. During my limited visits to Marc, I must point out that I never saw them - not one, not the other. No, I never heard them laugh either.'*9

Martin states that she learned about the abduction of An and Eefje in the same way. Dutroux told her that he had kidnapped these two girls together with Michel Lelièvre. Weinstein knew about the kidnapping. It was the period when he constantly hung out with her husband. Regarding the motive, she concluded from a conversation with Dutroux that Weinstein was 'shy' and wanted to help his friend in this manner. According to Michèle Martin, the four girls were kept together in his house in Marcinelle for only a brief spell. She is confident that An and Eefje never knew that Julie and Melissa were incarcerated in the same place. She was not allowed upstairs when she came to Marcinelle during that period. Presumably, An and Eefje stayed in the basement, and Julie and Melissa went upstairs, or vice versa. Shortly after the new school year began, Marc told me that he no longer wanted to keep the two big girls in the house and that he, with his help, had brought them to Weinstein so that he alone could dispose of them (...). One evening in September 1995, Marc came to see me at the house in Sars and told me the girls were both dead. When he said this to me, he had tears in his eyes. He came to me and took me in my arms as if I needed to cry with him. He also told me that he had handed them over to Bernard and had provided him with drugs to put them to sleep. He said he didn't want to discuss it further and would never discuss it again. His attitude was as if it had hurt him, but to me, it was clear that he had killed them along with Bernard. He added that he had buried them at Bernard's underneath something, a "thing" that they should have removed first. He gave me the impression that they would never be found wherever they were buried.' But why did he kill them? Michèle Martin ponders the question for a moment. 'Marc explained to me that they were a nuisance. He could do nothing with them in broad daylight.'*10

A little less than a year after this statement, Michèle Martin will accuse her husband in even more explicit terms of the crime for which he wanted to blame someone else at all costs, but at the same time, she will also add some nuance to his intent. She stayed at her mother's place in Waterloo that day at the end of June 1995 when she heard a news report on the television about two missing children in Grâce-Cologne. 'The next day, Marc came to see me in Sars to tell me that he and Bernard had kidnapped these girls. He gave me some details that day, such as the fact that they had made a mistake. Just after the abduction, he told me, they realised they were too young. On several occasions, he also explained to me afterwards that he scolded Weinstein for not starting the car fast enough and that the meeting with the two girls came about by chance and they were insufficiently prepared.'*11

The police reports drafted by Inspector Masson and his colleagues on the interrogations of Michèle Martin differ in style from those of their colleagues handling the questioning of Dutroux, Lelièvre and Nihoul. These reports use a question-and-answer style to represent the suspects' statements fully. In the case of the Arlon Judiciary Police, the situation is different. Now and again, they mention specifically that Michèle Martin has intimated to speak "the truth, the absolute truth". Martin spares no effort to demonstrate her goodwill. 'You know that I was convicted of participating in two kidnappings at the time,' she admits seemingly spontaneously during an interrogation in mid-1997. 'Well, actually, there were three.' (kidnappings). This is a nice-to-know fact, but possibly Michèle Martin also knows that she can no longer be convicted since the trial for these crimes happened in the past. Whether she deserves the status of a credible turncoat is not so sure. Investigating judge Jacques Langlois is no longer losing sleep over it today. Still, a thorough analysis of Martins' revelations over the months leads to the strong suspicion that she always remained Dutroux's criminal partner - even after August 1996.

Marc Dutroux was placed under arrest on December 6th, 1995. He remained in prison in Jamioulx until March 20th. This is the period of the house searches by the Special Investigations Brigade ('BOB') officer René Michaux in Dutroux's house in Marcinelle. There, he hears children's

voices but chooses to ignore them. On December 13th, 1995, he confiscated a videotape with the caption "Perdu de Vue, Marc."*13 He also found chains, padlocks and keys - presumably the items to handcuff An and Eefje- and a speculum, a small jar of vaginal cream and chloroform. More than three years after the facts, it appears that Michaux had also confiscated a videotape showing Dutroux filming the works on his basement dungeon as well as the rape of a Czech girl. The fact that all this was lying around in the house not only shows that Michaux was incredibly negligent but also that Michèle Martin could hardly maintain the claim that, as a regular visitor to the house, she had no more than a vague idea of what Dutroux was up to. On December 19th, 1995, Michaux and his men searched the home in Marcinelle again. The result is just as pitiful as six days earlier.

On December 23rd, 1995, Michèle Martin knocked on Freddy Lavergne's door. He is the locksmith who held the new house keys. He can't help her, he says. If she wants to enter her ex's house -Dutroux and Martin are divorced and living separately to claim higher social welfare benefits- she must arrange it through the police. Martin proceeds to visit Inspector Philippe De Windt of the Charleroi police. He relays Martin's request to Michaux, who has the keys delivered to Jamioulx prison. Once Michèle Martin collected the keys on January 6th, 1996, all verifiable material ceased to exist. She wants to enter the house in Marcinelle, that is certain. But why? To bring Julie and Melissa food, Dutroux and Martin claim.

Dutroux first claims that he ordered Weinstein to feed the girls. Once that version is outdated -Weinstein was dead by then- Dutroux states that he called Lelièvre to do the job and gave him 50,000 francs for his expenses. Lelièvre denies this version of the events at all costs. It finally appears that Dutroux made a deal with the hostages of the rue Daubresse in November 1995 and must have assumed

that day in the police commissioner's office that he stood no risk of being arrested. Once the police investigation had reached this point, Dutroux had a new version ready: the arrest had indeed come as a surprise, and now it was Michèle

Martin to bring the children food.*14 Michèle Martin confirmed this version of the events, at least to some extent.

Michèle Martin recounted on August 28th 1996 that she went to Marcinelle for the first time after collecting the keys. She stood in the hallway, hesitating, trying to muster the courage. In the end, she says, she turned her heels and left; she didn't dare go further. 'At the end of January 1996, I returned, claims Michèle Martin. 'I descended into the basement, trembling like a reed. When I stood in front of the shelter, I was overwhelmed by a serious dilemma. On the one hand, I wanted to open the shelter, but on the other hand, I did not want to become an accomplice in their actions. But I also wanted to help those children. At the same time, I was frightened of them, although there was no basis for my fear. I still refused to believe that those girls were present in that cage. In my mind, lions had taken their place - wild beasts that could tear me apart. I know that's hard to grasp, but I was far from reality. I then started tugging at the rack at the entrance to the storage room. I couldn't get the thing to move. Finally, when I pulled on it with all my might, the hatch opened and fell out of its hinges. I straightened the hatch, which served as a door, and used it to reseal the opening. It turned out that there was a small opening between that door and the entrance to the storeroom. Then I fled, thinking the door was slightly ajar so the girls could escape.'

From Michèle Martin's subsequent statements, one can conclude that her interrogators are helping to ease her conscience. The girls did not escape, she and the Arlon police interrogators note. 'I had no idea about the layout of that storeroom either,' the official report states. 'Marc had only told me to open the door and leave the food there. You tell me another gate is inside the hiding place, a hatch. You tell me that this door and the hatch are on the left of the entrance to the shelter and that it is necessary to enter the shelter to see them. I swear I never saw this second gate or the opening in the hatch because I only left food at the entrance. I wanted to go further, but an irrepressible force prevented me from doing so. It is difficult to explain my state of mind in that event - even now. I cannot possibly say what state I was in at the time. I then went back upstairs and left the house. I still wonder how I managed to reach my mother's place today.

So that is the only time Michèle Martin descended into the basement of Marcinelle after the kidnapping of Julie and Melissa. Between that moment at the end of January 1996 and Dutroux's release and going with her to check their status, Martin says someone else must have been in the house. I noticed this because some specific objects in the house had been moved.

When I went to see Marc again in prison -he was the only one I could talk to about the children- I told him that I had left the food behind the cellar door but couldn't close it properly after that. He erupted into a rage and said that I absolutely had to go back and close the door. I never went back into that basement. That was simply impossible for me.'

Finally, Michèle Martin said she would return to Marcinelle regularly during February, not for the children but to feed and walk the dogs. She noticed that strangers had entered the house and took two German shepherds there. Every four days, she visited the place, usually accompanied by her mother, to open large cans of dog food. She gets the dog food from the store around the corner. There, as in the post office, hang the portraits of Julie and Melissa. 'I wish to specify that the two dogs could not have harmed the children,' says Michèle Martin during her interrogation. '(...) I assure you that everything I have explained is proof of my goodwill and that I was never aware of anything.*15 This is also what her lawyer will later proclaim during TV debates: Michèle Martin was unaware of many facts but does her utmost to assist with the enquiry.

Michèle Martin is lying. She does know the basement very well. The evidence for this is a bucket of paint. During an interrogation on July 22nd, 1997, she recollects the events of two years earlier -some three weeks after the kidnapping of Julie and Melissa. Michèle Martin suddenly declares: 'I must also tell you that when they finished the work on the hidden prison cage, Dutroux ordered me to paint it (...). As for the choice of the colour yellow, he told me that it depicted the sun and, therefore, was an uplifting colour. At first, I refused to do what he asked me. Dutroux insisted and raised his voice, so I

finally complied with his request. He descended into the hideout with me. He showed me the areas I had to paint, namely the walls and the ceiling, up to above the iron gate inside, which divided the shelter into two areas (...)*16

If anyone in early 1996 besides Marc Dutroux knew there was another iron gate behind the basement hatch, it was Michèle Martin. How could she support her claim that her conscience was appeased when she left some food at the slightly ajar entrance hatch during her 'visit' in January? Anyone who examines these events logically will come to the inconceivable conclusion that she only aggravated the torture of the two children by placing some food within their field of vision without them being able to reach it with their hands.

According to Dutroux, Julie and Melissa were still alive when he was allowed to leave prison on March 20th, 1996 and repatriated to Marcinelle. If correct, the children survived for 104 days on a ration of a few tins of food and some bottles of water, which constituted 'provisions for a month' according to Dutroux. Assuming that Dutroux is not lying -which is quite a bold assertion- Julie and Melissa behaved at least as heroically as Bobby Sands, the famous militant of

the Irish Republican Liberation Army, the IRA, who died May 5th 1981, after a hunger strike that had lasted 66 days. Surviving a 66-day hunger strike was considered a record back in '81.

At the end of December 1996, after studying the judicial file that was accessible to him, Dutroux corrected himself that there had been food for "two months". Even then, the notion that the two children survived that long is practically impossible. Here's the problem: no one knows exactly how much provisions were left to Julie and Melissa. Based on the number of cans and bottles Dutroux left with Sabine Dardenne and Laetitia Delhez, investigating judge Langlois consulted Jaroslaw Kolanowski, endocrinologist and nutritionist at the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL), in late 1998. Kolanowski calculates that it is technically 'possible to survive for 104 days with the rations left behind by Dutroux, but only if the available food is rationed meticulously'. In his report, he points out it is improbable that Julie and Melissa could have imposed

such a stringent diet on themselves. How can two children of eight be expected to figure out the exact portions without knowing the end date of their starvation? The professor also points out that the power was cut off in the depths of winter after Michaux's house searches. As a result, the ventilation system installed by Dutroux and Weinstein could not have functioned. Possible but extremely unlikely is the expert's conclusion.*17

Gino Russo, Melissa's father, reacts with dismay to the conclusion Langlois links to the expert's work: 'In his report, the professor lists page after page of indisputable reasons why it could NOT have been possible for the children to have survived. But at the end, under the section "conclusions", Langlois alleges that it can be done 'in theory'. Everyone sees that it is different, but when Langlois quotes this report in court, he only remembers that one little sentence: it is possible. The result is that Dutroux's lawyers can already utilise the assumption that Julie and Melissa were still alive in March 1996. That is the "legal" reality. But it is apparent to all who can read that the facts are the other way around.'*18

Several witnesses spotted Julie and Melissa in the company of a French-speaking couple in the second half of 1995 in Knokke, Blankenberge, Switzerland and prostitution bars in Charleroi. Witness testimonies from around that timeframe already contained vague descriptions that could be reminiscent of Dutroux, Martin and/or Weinstein. One by one, Langlois' investigators label the testimonies as false, coincidental or based on fantasy. They may be, but none of it is very reassuring. For example, there is an identifiable reason why Dutroux ordered Martin to travel to Marcinelle with two Malinois shepherd dogs, and it most likely had nothing to do with Julie and Melissa. Here's the real reason: during Dutroux's imprisonment, someone had broken into his house. Anyone who wants to believe that Julie and Melissa were still in the place in Marcinelle after Michaux's two bungled house searches must consider this fact: Over their heads, someone committed a burglary.

Shortly after the Dutroux case broke out, neighbour Viviane C. in Marcinelle boasted with pride that she had already pulled a trick on "that monster". Nobody believes her claims at first. She claims that she, her friend André F. and his

sister Georgette L. had broken into Dutroux's empty house at the end of 1995 or early '96. She had removed his computer, a pile of video cassettes, a pencil case, and many other seemingly worthless things. Viviane C. has to sit down and take a moment when she hears from the police that there are reasons to think that Julie and Melissa were starving in that very house at the time.*19 André F. seems less aware of the seriousness of the situation and merely states that he 'heard a door open downstairs' during the burglary and, for that reason, had fled in panic. F. returned in April with some friends to steal some more.*20

Reconstructing the loot amassed by Viviane, Georgette, and André becomes hopeless. It leads to the most desolate neighbourhoods of Charleroi, where barter is rampant. When the police interrogate her, Georgette L. reports with great regret that her boyfriend erased the videotapes by recording cartoons for her children.*21

It may well be that in doing so, the husband destroyed essential investigative evidence. The Commodore-pc of Dutroux is found at Nadia L. She installed a hard disk and erased almost all files, including an old address list.*22

In prison, Michèle Martin is knitting as a woman possessed. The Arlon police officers give her indications that her case is not looking too bad. Perhaps the day when Frederic, Andy and Céline can try on the finished products of her knitting is not so far off.

NOTES:

1. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, September 19, 1996.
2. De Morgen, August 23rd, 1996.
3. At the end of 1996, during a search of Charbonnier's home, a similar hidden cellar room was discovered. The Hainaut gangsters used them to hide stolen goods and money.
4. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GP Arlon, August 14, 1996, PV 2.533.
5. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GP Arlon, August 14, 1996, PV 2.534

6. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GP Arlon, August 15, 1996, PV 2.535.
7. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GP Arlon, August 17, 1996, PV 2.540.
8. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GP Arlon, August 18, 1996, PV 2.541.
9. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GP Arlon, August 28, 1996, PV 2.555. In the translation into Dutch, language usage has been slightly adjusted to make the whole more comprehensible.
10. Interview with Michèle Martin, Judicial Police Arlon, 28 August 1996, PV 2.555.
11. Interview of Michèle Martin, Judicial Police Arlon, July 22, 1997, PV 8.177.
12. Interview with Michèle Martin, Judicial Police Arlon, July 22, 1997, PV 8.177
13. The videotape was returned to Marc Dutroux on March 20th, 1996, and was never seen again. Judging by the inscription on the box, it contained a recording of an investigative program broadcast on the French TF1 at the end of 1996. The program focused on Julie and Melissa's disappearances.
14. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, September 19, 1996.
15. Interrogation Michèle Martin, Judicial Police Arlon, August 28, 1996, PV 2.555.
16. Interrogation Michèle Martin, Judicial Police Arlon, July 22, 1997, PV 8.177.
17. Parts of Professor Kołanowski's report were leaked to the newspapers La Lanterne and Het Belang van Limburg on February 10th, 1999
18. Telephone interview with Gino Russo, February 10th, 1999.
19. Findings, BOB Brussels, September 15th, 1996, PV 114.105.
20. Interrogations Viviane C., André F. and others, BOB Brussels, 16 September 1996, PV 113.921.
21. Search at the home of Georgette L., Charleroi police, September 16th, 1996, PV 22.881.
22. Analysis by the BOB Brussels, September 17th, 1996, PV 114.241

4. Why does everyone see me as the big scapegoat

Marc Dutroux, December 1996

- How could you know your wife was looking after the girls?
- She assured me she had replenished supplies the day the hatch came down. She then told me about her difficulties positioning the door back in place. I never thought she would fail to leave these girls food. When she came to see me in prison, she claimed she had done so. I thought about it then and began to realise that she was lying. (...)
- Why did you fail to initiate any action with Lelièvre? According to your facts, he received 50,000 francs to care for the girls.
- I tried to contact him. I tried to obtain his mother's telephone number. I was told it was an unlisted number.*1

In the eyes of Marc Dutroux, guilt is the one thing everyone can carry except himself. To his interrogators, he is a suspect to whom some specific rules apply. The first rule is never to use "victim" when referring to someone other than himself. In this case, he is the primary victim of a wicked, careless world and a miserable childhood. To the women who write to him in prison, he recounts stories about his unhappy childhood. He often likes to refer to the suicide of his mentally disabled brother in 1993.*2

Victor Dutroux's father is not reluctant to entertain the press about his son after August 1996. He emphasises that he has always had severe doubts about the biological bond. 'Jeanine and I had known each other for just seven months when Marc was born. Jeanine said he was born prematurely, and I believed it until I learned that the child weighed three and a half pounds. The weight of a full-grown baby.'

Marc was born on November 6, 1956. Victor had already left for Burundi, where he seemed to be heading for a carefree existence as a teacher until Jeanine joined him soon after with the baby. Shortly after Burundi's independence, the family returned and settled in Obaix, a sleepy village north of Charleroi, where three more brothers and a sister joined the family. Victor is a dictatorial head of the family. He doles out blows for trivialities, demands absolute silence during his siesta, and makes his children weed the garden when their favourite matinee program is on TV. Porn magazines are strewn about the house. The children arouse the compassion

of the village locals. Usually neatly dressed but always looking sad. At home, Marc goes on a rampage. 'He used to throw all his toys in a heap and lie on them like a hen on her eggs, so his brother couldn't reach them,' recalls Victor. One day, he hurled a brick at his father's head. His parents often found a brief letter from the school in the letterbox: 'Your son is unwanted in our institution.' When young Marc accomplishes a year of study at the same school, it is considered an accomplishment.

At age nine, Marc Dutroux takes two book bags to school: one with textbooks, the other with comics that he rents to classmates for 1 franc a day. Those kids who don't pay up get a slap. Pornographic pictures and then stolen motorcycles soon replaced his comics initiative. As a teenager, when school is out, he earns some extra money by assisting an older homosexual man to masturbate. Notwithstanding, Dutroux just about managed to obtain his A3 diploma as an electrician and found a job with the glass company Glaverbel. Now that he is making money, the situation at home goes from bad to worse. Since father Victor moved out in 1972, the younger children suffer even more under the tyranny of their oldest brother. He demands a beefsteak every day, refuses to share 'his' bottle of Coke and treats his disabled brother like a dog. Mother has remarried, and since Marc fails to pester this intruder out of the house, he leaves the parental home. He cuts an alarming figure in the factory, but the boss shows understanding 'because he is so young and already lives on his own'. It is not only there that Dutroux succeeds in eliciting compassion from adults. During the medical examination for military service, he fabricates a medical condition with one ear, thus avoiding joining the Belgian army and starting to believe that he is invulnerable and protected by an invisible force.

In 1976, Marc turned twenty years old and found in the sensitive, two-year-younger orphan girl Françoise D. a willing ear for his stories about his sad existence as an outcast. He meets her at the skating rink. Pictures from back then suggest a developing tender love story, but images can be deceiving. He cannot tolerate Françoise D paying more attention to their firstborn than him. In the evening, neighbours often hear their children crying, left to fend for themselves at home while Dad and Mom are out and about. Dutroux, meanwhile, had quit his

job and became a scrap metal dealer. He goes out at night to steal gas cylinders, car parts, mopeds and whatever he can lay his hands on. When Dutroux is not tinkering with auto parts and write-offs, he goes ice skating, at first in Charleroi, then in Brussels in 1981. He prefers the ice rinks of Vorst and Montignies-sur-Sambre but also travels regularly to Namur, Valenciennes, Tournai, Bruges and Woluwe-Saint-Lambert.*3 In Charleroi, he plays on the Okapi hockey team. 'That was quite remarkable if you think back to it now,' says Armand De Beyn, who also often went skating there at the time. Ice hockey is quite the bourgeois sport, so he was the odd one in the team.'

On Sunday, October 12th 1980, Armand De Beyn had an altercation with the moustached young man. That afternoon, Dutroux was amusing himself, pushing teenage girls to the ice at high speed, feigning concern, then reaching under their skirts and touching their breasts. De Beyn, 21, came to the skating rink that day with his 19-year-old girlfriend, who had been the victim of Dutroux's antics on several occasions. De Beyn told the moustache several times to cut it out. After the fourth collision, however, Dutroux repeats his stunt, and a few moments later, De Beyn and Dutroux are in a fighting scrap on the ice. It seems a ludicrous incident, but Dutroux deems it necessary to call the Charleroi police. They interrogate the bystanders and compile an extensive file.

Armand De Beyn is probably the only Belgian person today who can say he has a criminal record on which Marc Dutroux's name appears in the 'victim' column. The brawl cost him a conviction by the Charleroi correctional court on May 28 1984, for deliberate battery and assault. 'When I saw him many years later on TV, I couldn't believe my eyes,' says De Beyn. But it was him, that jerk who insisted on prosecuting me for five years in Court because of some pushing and shoving on the ice rink. The affair cost me over a hundred thousand francs, including more than sixty thousand francs in medical expenses and compensation. In 1997, I took some tentative steps toward some form of rehabilitation but changed my mind. I had a strong hunch, but it was better to let the matter rest. Truly insane things happened. The police only took notice of the statements of Dutroux's friends, who stated in unison that I had started the brawl. One skater was so shocked by what he saw and heard that he came to the hearing to testify.

Suddenly, two gendarmes appeared and escorted him out of nowhere, giving the judge the impression that the man who had come to make a statement in my favour was a truant himself. That was also what the judge thought.’*4

The documents De Beyn kept on the case offer an insight into how Marc Dutroux saw the world in the early 1980s. With the slight bruise on his thumb that he sustained from the 'assault', he tried to obtain the status of permanent disability. A certain Doctor, Draux, had drawn up a diagnosis to this effect. Because the Court in Charleroi did not follow him on this point, Dutroux immediately appealed against the verdict. And, unbelievable but true, the Charleroi prosecutor's office also demanded an appeal because poor Dutroux did not receive sufficient compensation. In May 1985, the Court of Appeal in Mons partially confirmed De Beyn's sentence.*5 The Court appointed a doctor to examine Dutroux's permanent

injuries to decide whether or not to grant him a monthly disability allowance.*6 'My lawyer, who I had to pay for, told me that the whole situation was very unusual,' says Armand De Beyn. 'But yes, what can one do about it?'

In 1981, Dutroux often hung out in Brussels. At the time, he drove around in a small van in which he regularly spent the night. At least, that is what his erstwhile companion deduced from the presence of a mattress in the back of the vehicle. The companion is called François H. and is, like Dutroux, an accomplished skater. Together, they are occasionally hired as overseers at the National Ice Rink in Vorst, which allows them free access to the rink. Both have their eye on the blond female teacher who often comes there to skate. Dutroux draws the longest straw, then leaves Françoise D. and their two children. Michèle Martin will submit to Marc Dutroux entirely, even more so than her predecessor. She will tacitly take his blows, cover for his misdeeds, and eventually participate in his crimes.

On June 9, 1983, Dutroux committed his first robbery, stealing jewellery and money from an elderly lady and inflicting injury to her vagina with a razor blade. Not long after, Dutroux meets Jean Van Peteghem, a reckless juvenile delinquent with a passion for weapons and a constant lack of

funds. With Van Peteghem, he will commit his first series of child abductions recorded by the courts. Their first attempt is in Obaix, where they pull an 18-year-old girl into a car on her way home and cover her eyes with band-aids. They throw the girl out at a garbage dump and force her to undress at a knife point. Her cries for help are smothered in a long, forceful French kiss. 'Don't marry', Dutroux tells her, 'This is what marriage is like.' He hands the girl a hundred franc note and drops her near the train station. A few weeks later, the same fate awaits an eleven-year-old girl at the municipal swimming pool of Gilly. Gradually, he refines his tactics. Dutroux explores swimming pools and schools, noting times and places of interest for abductions. He now takes his victims to Route de Philippeville 128 in Marcinelle or the empty house next door.

The kidnappers narrate some absurd stories to their victims. Dutroux simulates different voices to make the victims believe they are a gang of five: the madman, the mute, the Italian, the butcher and the gentleman. The latter is Dutroux himself. He spends a few hours each time with the girls alone. He entertains them for hours about the cosmos and black holes or talks about motor racing and himself. He weaves Van Peteghem's dramatic experiences into his life story: he poses as a 22-year-old orphan who lost his 18-year-old girlfriend, Maryline. She had been hit by a truck a year earlier. They subsequently inflict lifelong trauma on their victims. They are raped for hours on end, then thrown out on the street like garbage. The scenes are filmed with a rented video camera. Why Dutroux films these horrific acts and what happens to the footage later seems of no one's concern during the enquiries. It is ultimately the detail about Maryline's truck accident that puts the gendarmerie on the kidnappers' trail; they check all the young girls who have been run over by a truck. *7

Considering the seriousness of the case, the public prosecutor in Charleroi wanted to bring Dutroux before the Assize Court. However, the Court was too preoccupied with the Borinage gang, which the Nivelles prosecutor Jean Deprêtre incorrectly associated with the Nivelles gang. (the "Brabant killers" see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brabant_killers). The public prosecutor of Mons didn't have much appetite for another

gruelling assize (jury) trial; hence, the correctional Court treated the case. This Court subsequently declared itself incompetent to take on the matter on November 4, 1988. This was obviously an assize case, is the consensus in Charleroi.*8 Dutroux, Martin and Van Peteghem appeared before the Court of Appeal in Mons on April 26, 1989. Only one journalist is present at the trial. This was Belgium in the mid-80s, and child abductors were not yet a well-known topic in the public sphere. In a brief report the day after the trial, the press agency Belga mentioned 'a case of vice offences'. And further: "Taking into account the seriousness of the facts, and the humiliating treatment they subjected their victims to, with all its psychological consequences, the Court sentenced Dutroux to thirteen and half years in prison and 6,000 francs fine. Van Peteghem received six and a half years imprisonment; Martin got five years instead of three. The Court also deprived Dutroux and Van Peteghem of their civil and political rights for five years."

The psychologists and social workers at Jamioulx prison did not know what to do with Dutroux back in 1986. He continues to profess his innocence and cries blue murder at every hint of the opposite. A parade of lawyers are consulted before Dutroux finds one he likes. The honour goes to the Brussels lawyer Didier de Quévy. Having access to a lawyer does not put a brake on Dutroux's zeal, however. On the contrary, in his cell, he busies himself day in and day out, digging through the testimonies of his victims. The result is dozens of pages of comments of the kind: 'How can Deborah N. claim that I stopped to change my license plate when the investigators themselves have determined that the screws were rusted?' Or: 'The van that the witness claims she saw was not mine. Mine doesn't have stickers on the back window.'

Daniel Dejasse shares a cell with Dutroux for two months during this period. He remembers his talents as a chess player, his outbursts of rage at the sight of a cigarette, his obsessional nocturnal hunts for imaginary mosquitoes - even in winter - and his truly disproportionally consumption of sugar. He nevertheless found his conversations with Dutroux quite entertaining. 'He was constantly lamenting the injustice done to him, but on the other hand, he was explaining to me how they had proceeded, how they had kidnapped those girls. The

atmosphere was one of "just us guys". He could talk for hours about what he considered to be his sexual escapades. Stories like the one about a couple kissing at the bar counter where he stands next to them and starts fidgeting under the girl's skirt. "And she didn't say anything; she just let me!" he exclaimed triumphantly.'

One thought has regularly caused Daniel Dejasse sleepless nights since August 1996. 'I have a vague recollection of a conversation in which I recall suggesting: 'you should build basements in your house to incarcerate those girls, then they can't snitch on you anymore.' I didn't mean this seriously, of course. It was more like sarcasm. I sometimes feel that the Dutroux affair results from my poorly understood joke. He suggested that I help him with construction work after my release. He talked about air ventilation systems and so on. He saw it all before him. He was very serious, very determined. When I saw that, I said no, of course. Pretty much right away after this conversation, he made sure, through his prison connections, to have me transferred to another cell.*9

Six years in jail fly by. Dutroux behaves like an exemplary prisoner. He manages to obtain penitentiary leave to care for his grandmother, who has dementia. His minder is hit by a nausea attack when he and Dutroux arrive at the elderly woman's home in Jemeppe-sur-Sambre. They find the poor lady like a pile of misery amidst a stinking, flea-ridden garbage dump, faeces and cat vomit. Dutroux plays the devoted grandson who relishes scratching the filth off the ground. It will only earn him extra credit in prison. He is granted a few more occasions of unescorted leave to complete the big cleanup. It is not even reported when he clocks in 48 hours late at one of those events. He applies for and receives parole once half of his sentence is over. Dutroux declines psychological and social assistance, but he is willing to be monitored by the nearly 70-year-old doctor Emile Dumont following his release. He is the same doctor from Uccle who Michèle Martin had previously enlisted to try and get her declared legally insane and who issues large prescriptions for Rohypnol, Haldol, and the contraceptive pill. Dumont prescribes her a triple dose. Dutroux later resells these pills to Michel Nihoul.

Dumont also ensures that Dutroux gets what he could not achieve via the trial against Armand De Beyn. The elderly doctor declared him 66 per cent disabled because of “anxiety attacks” on April 9, 1992, a mere three days after Justice Minister Melchior Wathelet signed a request for his conditional release.

Dutroux is a free man with a plan. He took courses in physics, mathematics and electricity in his cell. Based on a study of his temporary residence and some do-it-yourself manuals, his mind has developed a list of small constructions to be carried out. He studied the effects of certain narcotics, even tested them in prison on fellow inmates, and later on Michèle Martin and his son Frédéric when he refused to go to bed at his allotted time. Investigators would later find thousands of pills in his houses. Virtually all the girls who fall into his clutches after 1992 are

administered Rohypnol or Haldol. Dutroux himself meticulously remembers the drugs he administered and their effects. Laetitia Delhez was given eight Rohypnol pills during her abduction; he explains to his interrogators. Sabine Dardenne received ten ('of which she spat out five'). Later, during their imprisonment, they received thirty more drops of Haldol. An Marchal and Eefje Lambrechts were each given five Rohypnol pills right after they were kidnapped and then another thirty Haldol drops. About Julie and Melissa, Dutroux claims that they never received anything.*10

Using medical prescriptions and empty or full boxes, detectives arrived at a preliminary list in early 1997 of the estimated contents of Marc Dutroux's medicine cabinet spanning five years. Eight hundred ninety-three capsules of Rohypnol, 32 bottles of Haldol (30 millilitres), 636 Rédomex tablets, 70 of Flunitrazepam, 105 pills of Microgym and 105 Réactivan tablets, sufficient to sedate up to three thousand victims. This kind of consideration makes even the most conservative-thinking police officers doubt whether they truly know all the names of Dutroux's victims. The vast majority of

the chemical arsenal was built up with prescriptions carelessly prescribed by Doctor Dumont for years. Just as it would never occur to him to wonder what Michèle Martin would require a triple dose of birth control pills, he would never ask Dutroux what he intended to do with all these narcotics. Dumont would never draw up a therapeutic report - although this is required by law -about Dutroux's consultations. Dutroux merely had to drop by, pay the fixed fee of 1,350 francs and leave with the obligatory certificate that he is "under observation."*11

His domestic pharmacy allows Dutroux to do whatever he wants with his victims, taking away their ability to notice or remember any events. 'One of the typical characteristics of Rohypnol is that it completely disables cognitive recollection functions for a certain period,' states doctor Peter Van Breuseghem, who is waging a dogged crusade against Rohypnol in Brussels. 'In the U.S., Rohypnol is nicknamed the "forget pill or mind eraser" (...) for a reason. Someone who has taken Rohypnol does not sleep. They can talk and walk and do whatever they want. But Rohypnol robs a person of their conscious mind. It makes you feel like you are consenting to what is happening.'*12

In its advice to Minister Wathelet, Bergen Prison's Observation and Treatment Unit (OBE) in early 1992 listed "social reintegration through employment as an argument favouring Dutroux's early release. The day after Dutroux leaves prison, Doctor Dumont turns the world upside down. In a medical certificate that should serve to justify Dutroux's disability, he states that 'the person concerned has become depressed as a result of his stay in prison.' If one compares the course of the two judiciary procedures, one must conclude that Dutroux was released because he had to find a job while being pronounced unfit for work. His status as an invalid gives him a monthly income far above what he could obtain as an unemployed person. To get an even higher amount, Dutroux and Martin married in prison in 1988, only to divorce later for the same reason.

From mid-1991, Marc Dutroux commenced a frantic buying spree of old hovels in the Charleroi area. A house for 300,000 francs in Marchienne- au-Pont. Another in Mont-sur-Marchienne (La Docherie) for 350,000 francs. A dilapidated

farmhouse in Sars-la-Buissière, where, as a recipient of social benefits, he outbids his neighbour Fernand Baudson at public auction with obvious glee. Where Dutroux gets the money from is a mystery. In four years, the ex-convict, who officially receives a social security allowance of 38,000 francs, rakes in a fortune of 6.5 million francs.

'Why does everyone see me as the big scapegoat?' asks Dutroux of his interrogators in late 1996. He maintains that one can only attribute minimal blame to him in this affair. The great culprits are Weinstein and Lelièvre. And as for Michèle Martin, he considers it unforgivable that she failed to feed Julie and Melissa. His interrogators are already satisfied that he makes any declaration. On September 19, 1996, he made his first statement on what he described as "the catastrophe" that he found in the basement in Marcinelle on March 20, 1996, the day of his release. What then follows is a chillingly detailed description of the condition in which he claims he found Julie and Melissa, 'who were more dead than alive.' 'They had been urinating in plastic bottles; there were paper handkerchiefs everywhere,' he notes. Dutroux enjoys the revulsion his words provoke. When he notices at the end of the interrogation that they made him declare in the text of the official report that the bodies of the two girls were 'placed on mattresses', he takes out the ballpoint pen and makes a minor correction. He deletes the word mattresses. To be very precise, it should read 'planks'.

During the hour-long interrogation, Dutroux claims that Melissa just about managed to raise herself and mumble that she could not remember when she had last eaten but did recall drinking something four days ago. 'I rushed to get water and a pipette,' Dutroux recounted. 'In this manner, I made Julie drink drop after drop. Then I gave Melissa a drink. I then filled a bathtub to ten inches with warm water at thirty-seven degrees. I went downstairs to get Julie and put her in the tub. Then I went and got Melissa and put her in the tub as well.'

That was the end. Julie was dead. He told Melissa that her friend had been 'taken to the hospital, washed her and put her in his bed. 'In the position where I normally sleep myself,' Dutroux stressed. 'I put the heating on the highest setting and tucked her in. I started to look through my stuff and found a box of Madeleine cookies. I went back upstairs to give her

some. She ate half of one. She also drank a little bit. I desperately wanted her to eat or drink something. She was having a lot of trouble swallowing. I watched over her. I stayed there for four days. My wife was there when I arrived at that house. I don't remember when she left. I remember ordering her to clean the house because it was impossible to make a move without stepping in dog shit.

It was horrific. My wife didn't help me care for the girls a single time. She stood there like a plant (...). I had to figure it out all by myself. As for Julie, I don't remember how I did it.'

The bottom line is that Dutroux tells it as if he were talking about a doll and tied her limbs with a string of clothesline. Because the body had to fit into a garbage bag, and that bag had to fit in the fridge. I didn't know, after all, how long I would have to stay at the head of the bed with Melissa,' Dutroux explains. 'I was convinced she would have regained sufficient strength after a few days. So I watched over her constantly, and at one point, she began to experience breathing difficulties.' Dutroux offers a detailed explanation, describing how he fought for Melissa's life for four days like an accomplished doctor and, at some point, fell asleep exhausted beside the bed.

- When I woke up, she had died.
- What did you do then?
- I brought her downstairs and put her in a plastic bag as well. I did that after a moment of mourning. I was exhausted.
- And what did you do then?
- I took Julie out of the refrigerator and took the two bodies to Sars.*13

There is one tiny consolation for those who try to imagine how this scenario played out: in all likelihood, it is entirely different from Dutroux's narrative. At the end of August 1996, investigators from the Brussels police found Marc Dutroux's wallet in his house in Marcinelle.*14 It contained, among other things, a shopping card from the supermarket Makro in Charleroi. The card contains a magnetic stripe, allowing investigators to reconstruct the holder's purchasing behaviour. Dutroux was at the Makro in Charleroi on March 21, 1996. March 21 is one day after his release, the day Dutroux claimed

that he was desperately trying to save Melissa. What was Dutroux's reason for his shopping visit to the Makro? That, too, can be traced from his card: he bought an air jack. 'I needed that jack to lift and repair the sliding door in the cellar,' Dutroux explained later.*15

As Dutroux continues to affirm his initial story in the face of material evidence to the contrary, Michèle Martin's account of March 21, 1996, in contrast, undergoes quite an evolution over time. At first, she claims she went to pick up Dutroux from prison by car and headed towards Marcinelle. Once there, he ran straight to the cellar. Coming back upstairs, he severely scolded her. 'When he brought me back to Waterloo by car, he told me on the way that he just couldn't understand why I had not done more for the children,' Martin stated in November 1996.*16 This version of the events reads that Dutroux called her on the phone the next day to inform her Julie was dead and Melissa was dying.

This seems like an unconditional recognition of what Dutroux told her, yet it is not. What actually happened to Julie and Melissa when Dutroux gave her a lift to Waterloo? Did he let the children starve in his Marcinelle basement for an extra few hours? One is tempted to consider that Julie and Melissa had been vacated from the basement long before that day or that Dutroux deliberately let them starve. After all these contradictions, it seems unequivocal that if Dutroux sent Martin to Marcinelle, it was not to maintain the children but to feed the two Malinois shepherds.

In the summer of 1997, Michèle Martin presented a new account of the events. This time, there is no longer any question about whether Julie or Melissa would have been alive in March 1996. They no longer appear in the tale at all. The story begins on the day of Dutroux's release.

- He had asked that I make my way to Marcinelle to open the door for him. We remained in the house for at least one and a half hours. Marc Dutroux did the rounds of the house twice. I remember he went to the attic to see how the burglars could have gained entry. It was a different day, but I returned to Marcinelle the day after that and

noticed he had bought a new pneumatic jack. He told me that it came from the Makro in Lodelinsart.

- Why had he bought that jack?
- He said it was to repair the gate to the storage room in the basement (...). Only later, after Julie and Melissa had been buried, I helped him, at his request, to reattach the sliding door with that jack. Dutroux pushed them into the hinges while I had to hold them upright.*17

The pneumatic jack teaches us even more. In June 1998, the support committee of Julie and Melissa's parents published a brochure in which they raised several questions about the research in Neufchâteau.*18 Based on measurements and a comparison with the specific features of the jack purchased by Dutroux, the committee concludes that one person, let alone a single female, could not have possessed adequate strength to pull a hatch of that size from its' hinges. So, who did? Even those who disregard Dutroux's statements on the subject will find significant contradictions, which allow one to assume that an unknown person had been in the children's cage at Marcinelle between December 5, 1995, and March 20, 1996. On December 18, 1996, Dutroux declared: 'After my release, I found a small basin under the girls' bed. So Michèle Martin must have been there at least once. She was in front of the entrance but outside the girls' reach, and she had left some food. She had blocked the sliding door that had fallen with bags of coal.'*19

An additional element demonstrates on rather vulgar grounds that Dutroux had other concerns in the first days after his release than the state of health of Julie and Melissa - again raising the question of whether any detail of his story can be authentic. An analysis of Dutroux's financial transactions shows that on March 22, 1996, he went to the Riga investment office in Marcinelle to trade his shares in the firm Recticel. Even the confrontation with this fact does not unnerve Dutroux. March 22 is two days after his release. 'Oh, March 22,' he responds. 'That was the day that Melissa started to pull through.'

Laconically, Marc Dutroux answers the questions he has been asked about his millions. He knows how to invest, he says. And there is money to be made with cars; he winks tellingly. During their house searches of Dutroux's homes,

investigators did indeed find evidence of his involvement in a black-market car dealership. However, compared to Michael Diakostavrianos and Gérard Pinon, he seemed to have played more of a passive service provider role within this gang. Between 1985 and 1992, Marc Dutroux spent six years in prison. In the four years that followed, he became a millionaire.

In other words, investments. For three months, the financial experts of the Brussels branch of the Neufchâteau cell (Brussels BOB) mapped out the financial transactions based on documents from investment offices and banks. Thirty-four thousand six hundred twenty-four Belgian francs: the frankly laughable result of Dutroux's activities as an investor between mid-1992 and August 1996. 'Yes, however' - remarks Dutroux when questioned about this; one must also consider the 'coupons' in Luxembourg.*21 He directs the investigators to his Atoma notebook, where he carefully recorded his Luxembourg earnings. Eighty thousand francs, the BOB officers found. But he achieved that result with loan money. For instance, he finances the purchase of the farm in Sars-la- Buissière with a 1.5 million loan. 'To get an accurate picture of the true profit, we should deduct the interest on that loan from the eighty thousand francs,' the investigators note. Dutroux did book some stock market success - with a bonus of more than 200,000 francs at one point - but lost virtually all of his profits through incredible mistakes. On December 15, 1994, he took the unfortunate initiative to sell his Union Minière bonds. He lost 400,000 francs. The free fall of Union Minière's stock market listing began as early as mid-November. Riga's business manager immediately tries to notify him of the impending financial catastrophe, but Dutroux is unreachable. He doesn't mind. He followed the situation closely in l'Echo de la Bourse and was convinced that the tide would turn for Union Minière - which did not happen.

Regarding the verifiable income of Marc Dutroux, there are as many reasons to assume a connection with child abductions as there are to be satisfied with the explanation given by Dutroux himself: a stroke of luck here, a stroke of luck there. On August 22, 1995, An Marchal and Eefje Lambrecks were abducted in Ostend. In September 1995, Dutroux cashed in 380,000 francs in his account 979-3848463-90 at Argenta in two instalments.

The origin of this money is untraceable. These were deposits Dutroux himself made at the counter. In November 1995, there was another double deposit at the counter, worth 142,000 francs.

On May 28, 1996, Sabine Dardenne was kidnapped in Kain. Three days later, he made another deposit at the counter of the first instalment of what would become a total of 130,000 francs. The second deposit follows on July 23.*22

Also, one month following the disappearance of Kim and Ken Heyrman, on January 4, 1994, Dutroux became even more affluent: a deposit of 50,000 francs. The sum was deposited on February 11, 1994, into account number 979-1909670-36 of Michèle Martin.*23 The most striking financial transfer occurred in February 1984, in the four days following the murder of the Brussels girl Christine Van Hees. Two days after that murder, Dutroux opened an account at the Crédit Professionnel bank under 125- 3655647-02. In four instalments, he received a total sum of 200,000 francs.*24

Marc Dutroux did have some financial windfalls: an inheritance from his grandfather in 1992, an insurance payment of more than a million after a fire in 1993, a rather handsomely compensated job as a construction worker, and the half-million he found in Bernard Weinstein's chalet after the murder. Dutroux does, however, spend a lot. He immediately spends Weinstein's half-million on purchasing a second excavator and his Renault Traffic. Most houses he buys often vary between 300,000 and 500,000 francs, which is dirt cheap.

On the other hand, very few people on welfare in Belgium can afford to buy a house of their own, even if they do little odd jobs and steal cars. It is also true that Dutroux, for unclear reasons, constantly transferred funds back and forth from one account to another. As a result, one sum of money can seem suspicious more than once. And yet, one cannot establish the sources of these cash flows. With his investments, Dutroux earned little or nothing. What, then, can explain his riches?

On December 9, 1996, First Sergeant Baudouin Dernicourt of the Brussels BOB sent his report on the financial part of the Dutroux investigation to Investigating Judge Langlois. He came to this somewhat surprising conclusion:

'None of the findings made so far allow us to demonstrate that Dutroux profited financially from trafficking in children. If so, these potential financial flows do not seem to originate in Belgium. Dutroux holds accounts in Slovakia and Luxembourg, but we have no information on these.'*25

Dernicourt mentions disability benefits, rents from houses and hangars, insurance fraud, economic insight, scrap commerce, off-the-book activities in the construction sector and theft crimes as the primary sources of income. He could not explain all of the revenues, but judging from his report, the gendarme went to interview Marc Dutroux himself for all the sums that raised questions and to ask him from where these originated. Dutroux claimed in response: thefts, scrap metal, moonlighting, and so forth. Langlois gratefully accepts Dernicourt's report.

When the X1 affair rocked the country one and a half years later, Julie's parents, Carine and Gino Russo, refrained from comment. They admit that they do not know enough about the case to form an opinion about the credibility of the X-witnesses. What does worry them is that Brussels BOB investigators suddenly openly accused each other of forgery and manipulation. 'This is still the Dutroux case,' remarked Gino Russo during a television programme. That's right, and the tension is not unfounded. Baudouin Dernicourt is also the man who will take charge of the destruction of the X1 dossier in a later phase of the investigation.

How frighteningly little is known about the fate of Julie, Melissa, An and Eefje -and the extent to which everyone seemed to want to distance themselves from the truth of their fates- becomes crystal clear on March 29, 1999. On that day, journalist Michel Bouffieux published an article in *Le Matin* that would have been considered a hand grenade into the inquiry one and a half years earlier. Bouffieux managed to get hold of a statement made by Michel Lelièvre at the Judiciary police of Arlon in October 1997. While watching a live broadcast of the Dutroux Commission in the prison's TV room, he suddenly remembered another 'missed opportunity' in Operation Othello.*26 In the middle of September 1995, he had visited Marc Dutroux in Marcinelle. Julie and Melissa must have still been in the basement there at the time, and possibly An and Eefje were still alive. At the time, he was driving his

grey Toyota Starlet, with license plate NCL561- for which, as usual, he had no proper vehicle credentials. Lelièvre had just left Dutroux's house but was stopped by some gendarmes parked by the roadside in a Pontiac. 'They asked me where I came from, asked for my automobile papers and searched my car. They returned to their service vehicle, and I had to wait an hour for them to return. I accosted them because it took so long. They replied that they were waiting for instructions. I had no registration, road tax, MOT or insurance for the car. I thought they would confiscate my car. I was a repeat offender in this respect.'*27

Michel Lelièvre's name was recorded in the Central database at that time. Any policeman who came across him was supposed to arrest him. He still had six months of prison time to serve. To his great surprise, the gendarmes returned his car papers and sent him on his way. Lelièvre now believes that this check was part of Operation Othello. During the hour that he sat in his car with the indicators on, the gendarmes did not check any other vehicle. If that is true, the gendarmerie once again lied to the nation. After they initially went through all kinds of hoops to deny that Operation Othello was in any way related to Julie and Melissa's disappearance, while the Verwilghen Commission later proved beyond doubt that this was -in fact- the case, the gendarmerie brass declared that they had no choice but to work "most discretely".

Dutroux and his companions needed not to notice that they were being observed by a platoon of the POSA (protection, observation, support & arrest platoons). For this reason, claim the gendarmerie, Dutroux, Martin and others were never interrogated at the time. If they were, there was a risk that the abducted children would have been disposed of immediately.

If indeed Michel Lelièvre stop & search took place in 'the middle of September 1995', this might have been the result. Michèle Martin says that An and Eefje were murdered 'shortly after the new school year started'. Dutroux says in one of his statements that the two girls from Limburg stayed 'three weeks in Marcinelle'. If one adds three weeks to August 23rd 1995, the night of the kidnapping, one arrives in the middle of September. 'If this is correct, I must conclude that my daughter could well have been murdered because Dutroux panicked', An's father, Paul Marchal, reacts. 'Even if it turns out that the gendarmes who stopped Lelièvre were not

involved with Operation Othello, and it was all just an unfortunate coincidence, the result remains the same. In whichever potential scenario, the gendarmerie should have turned on all the sirens at the time and immediately arrested Dutroux and his gang. If they were standing there for an hour waiting for instructions, those gendarmes must have been informed about Operation Othello, right? I'm sorry, but it drives me crazy to think that they would have decided among themselves to pretend for the sake of convenience and the image of the police force to pretend that nothing was going on. This practically forces me to conclude that they deliberately wanted to give Dutroux a signal.*28

The gendarmerie never bothered to respond to the article in *Le Matin*.*29 On the contrary, chronology seems to explain everything. On September 19, 1995, the gendarmerie decided, for unclear reasons, to suspend the covert POSA stakeout of the equally covert Operation Othello.*30 This probably happened the day after the Lelièvre incident.

NOTES:

1. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, September 19, 1996.
2. The other children fared better: two of Marc Dutroux's brothers became mail carriers, and his sister is a nurse.
3. Marc Dutroux himself rattles off this entire list to his interrogators. BOB Brussels, December 17, 1996, PV 100.468.
4. Interview with Armand De Beyn, January 11, 1999.
5. His 'share in the facts' was reduced from 50 to 10 %, but nothing changed about the damages he had to pay—Bergen Court of Appeals, May 21, 1985, case 479H84.
6. The case involved Doctor Bernard Minet of Gembloux. How he reacted to Dutroux's complaints about his thumb is not known. What is certain is that Marc Dutroux was arrested a short time later for a series of abductions and rapes of underage girls.
7. In the early 1990s, shortly after his release, Jean Van Peteghem suffers the same fate. He is run over by a city bus in Liege.

8. Only Michèle Martin was convicted of three years of effective imprisonment. Against the advice of her lawyer, Dutroux gets her to appeal.
9. Interview with Daniel Dejasse, July 15, 1998.
10. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, January 11, 1997, PV 100.016.
11. Search at the home of Doctor Emile Dumont, August 30, 1996, PV 112.705.
12. Interview Dr. Peter Van Breuseghem, Humo, April 6, 1999.
13. Interview of Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, September 19, 1996.
14. Brussels police station, August 26, 1996, PV 112,676
15. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, Brussels BOB, November 14, 1996, PV 116.207.
16. Interrogation Michèle Martin, Brussels BOB, November 6, 1996, PV 116.201.
17. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GP Arlon, July 22, 1997, PV 8.177.
18. The brochure *Au Nom de Quoi?* was written to react to the controversial RTBf broadcast *Au Nom de la Loi*. Based on a one-sided interpretation of Michèle Martin's statements (the same as in this chapter), it concluded that Julie and Melissa could not possibly have left the Marcinelle house at the end of 1995 or the beginning of 1996.
19. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, December 18, 1996, PV 100.477.
20. Interrogation Marc Dutroux, Brussels BOB, November 11, 1996, PV 116.183.
21. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, Brussels BOB, November 14 1996, PV 116.207.
22. Brussels and Thuin BOB, August 23rd, 1996, official reports 112.546 and 100.518.
23. Brussels BOB, August 23, 1996, official report 112.647.
24. Brussels BOB, June 2, 1997, official report 151,797.
25. BOB Brussels report, December 9, 1996, PV 117.370.
26. This regards the extra session of October 14, 1997, where the commission learns, to its surprise, of attempted car theft by Marc Dutroux just before the

abduction of Julie and Melissa. Those responsible for Operation Othello were aware of this yet still did not take this opportunity to interrogate Dutroux.

27. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, Judicial Police Arlon, October 1997, PV 8147. Reprinted from Le Matin, March 29, 1999.
28. Telephone interview with Paul Marchal, March 29, 1999.
29. Telephone interview with the press service of the gendarmerie on March 29th, 1999, yielded nothing more than 'no comment.'
30. Two more POSA observations followed on October 13 and 16, 1995.

5. 'During my stay in that house, I heard Dutroux mention two names: Michel and Jean-Michel'

Laetitia Delhez, August 19, 1996

Nothing could be more depressing than a vacation with eight people in a chalet in each other's faces and dripping rain for a soundtrack. All the comic books had been read, and the campsite Karaoke no longer entertained anyone. It kept

raining. Mrs V had resigned herself to a rubbish holiday. But then, that morning, the sun suddenly came out. 'Alright, kids,' mum clapped her hands together. 'What are we going to do today?' 'Swimming!' shrieked the little ones. 'In Bertrix, there's a nice swimming pool,' suggested Daan, the eldest son.*1

At five minutes to two in the afternoon, the crowded minibus of the Flemish family V arrives at the Bertrix swimming pool parking lot. Father V is the family's breadwinner, working in a car factory and stares admiringly at the shiny contours of a brand new BWM 5-series. His eyes then catch the rusty old van parked right beside the beamer. After the summer, the family plans to buy a new car, and with the prospect of this purchase, the wreck is a source of considerable hilarity. 'Look at this,' laughs Mrs V. 'It's going to lose its muffler. And he won't get far with those tyres either.' Grandma tries to peek in through the darkened windows but gives up, grumbling: 'Like a pigsty.'

At the pool, a setback awaits the family. It is reserved for a party of disabled children and is not due to reopen to the public until three o'clock in the afternoon. The four youngest children gambol in the playground next to the pool. Leaning against the gate is a dark-haired man with a moustache. 'That man stood out because there were few adults about,' Mrs V recalls later. A few meters away at the entrance to the athletics track, another bizarre-looking gentleman was watching the children. Wiry face. Hair in a parting. Large belly. White shirt, dark blue suit pants.' On the playground itself, Mrs V notices three more women. Two mums near a slide and a blonde woman with a loosely tied ponytail occupying a park bench. Next to her is a baby sleeping in a buggy. While Mrs V and her husband discuss in the driveway, should we wait or find another pool? A young, skinny guy walks by. 'A nonchalant-looking character is wearing jeans and a leather vest. He walked right up to the one with the moustache and exchanged a few words. He subsequently approached the large-bellied one and whispered something. He then took up a post at the swimming pool entrance door.'

The cafeteria is also closed. Off to another pool, then. It is 2h20 in the afternoon when Mrs V calls out to the children. In hindsight, this is the moment she remembers most vividly. 'The

two men on the fence turned and looked at me. They were talking to each other in French in a whisper. They kept staring at me.' Like a hen counting her chicks, Mother V turned around again as she left the place. She's always done that since she accidentally left her youngest at home one Saturday and didn't notice until she arrived at the supermarket. 'Those men at the pool were observing us the entire time. It was truly peculiar.'*2

Friday, August 16th, marks the day when Belgium meets Marc Dutroux, Michèle Martin, Michel Lelièvre and Michel Nihoul. In their summer rental chalet in Poupehan, one of the children shrieks when the suspects appear on the small TV screen. 'It was them, one hundred per cent sure,' says Mrs V. All four of them. We spent the weekend wondering whether we should report them to the gendarmerie. After all, they already caught the perpetrators.' 'Maybe,' suggests the dad, 'it might be important for the authorities to know that the gang was already there in the afternoon.' The parents decide that only themselves and their oldest son will testify. 'Daan mainly remembered Nihoul, who was standing at the athletics track', says Mrs V. 'Daan is in a sports club and wanted to check out the track. He stood there for twenty minutes shoulder to shoulder with Nihoul.' When one hears mother V talking about the swimming pool, the athletics track and the playground, one would imagine some massive sports and recreation complex. The only way to understand how close these people were to the situation is to go to Bertrix and take in the surroundings. Everything took place within a few square meters.

Mrs V has yet to learn into which wasps' nest she is stepping into when, on Monday, August 19, she pushes open the door of the rickety public telephone booth at Poupehan's main square. Moments later, two gendarmes of the Bouillon brigade drive onto the camping site with their van to take the parent's statements. They were in Bertrix on August 9 and recognised Dutroux, Lelièvre, Martin and Nihoul; the gendarmes jotted down in their notes, asking the family to drop by the gendarmerie station in two days.*3

In Bouillon, father, mother and son were confronted by an ostensibly less than motivated gendarme that Wednesday. For

him, the Dutroux case is as clear as day. The perpetrators had been arrested. The only facts these people can add are elements already known in Neufchâteau. However, he notices that the three Flemish tourists do their utmost to recollect the twenty-minute encounter with the kidnappers' gang as accurately as possible. There are small details in their story that the investigators will verify and discover they are accurate: the colour of Michèle Martin's baby carriage, Dutroux's pants, Nihoul's shirt...*4

Laetitia Delhez was abducted on Friday, August 9th, at about 9 PM. Two witnesses saw the kidnappers: a nun and a student. The nun saw the white van in the early evening; the student spotted it early in the afternoon. Around 1 PM, he recalls. The student becomes a national hero in late August. Since childhood, he has had a mania for car plates. He remembered that one because it contained the initials and part of his sister Frédérique's birth date. The student's memory is Dutroux's Waterloo. It is he who put the investigators on the right track. Therefore, everyone, including the gendarmerie in Bouillon, logically assumes that Dutroux, Nihoul and co were already in Bertrix on Friday afternoon. The V family readily accepts this thesis. Pro forma, they are asked what else they can remember that day. 'That evening market', remarks father V. 'We drove through the village of Rochehaut after swimming. There was that evening market.' The gendarme turns around and beckons a colleague.

- Say, that night market in Rochehaut, when was that again?
- Let me think. I used to direct the traffic there myself.
- Wasn't that the day Laetitia was kidnapped?
- Yes, that Friday. That must have been then.*5

Laetitia Delhez -one of the two Dutroux victims who were later rescued- saw two men during her abduction: Marc Dutroux and Michel Lelièvre. She told investigators on August 19 that she never noticed Nihoul. That evening, she was addressed from the van by Lelièvre. Dutroux then grabbed her from behind and pushed her into the truck. Laetitia underwent the same Rohypnol treatment as Sabine Dardenne. 'I woke up in a raised bed,' she says. 'I only had my panties on. I was chained to a bed. Later, Dutroux also tied me onto the bed, laying on my back (...). When he came to bring me food, he was only

wearing underpants. He forced me to take a bath with him.' Dutroux tells the same story to Laetitia as the one he fed to Sabine: her parents refused to pay the ransom, and therefore, his boss thinks she should die. This is why the decision to lock them in the basement became her choice, not Dutroux. She did not eat much during her stay in Marcinelle. 'We were only allowed to open a can of food if Dutroux hadn't dropped by for two days. We had to do our business in plastic buckets. These were only emptied when they had filled them to the brim (...) Dutroux called me Isabelle.' When the Dutroux case broke, speculation about videos and photos supposedly found in his houses circulated for weeks. In the end, it would turn out that this is not the case. This substantiation advances the realisation to many observers that the case is not as outrageous as it initially seemed. Evidently, this is a case of an isolated pervert who abducted children 'for his pleasure'. During her interrogation, Laetitia Delhez suggests alternative perspectives: 'Dutroux had taken pictures of Sabine and showed them to me.' No pictures of Sabine Dardenne were ever recovered at Marc Dutroux's place. Nobody knows where they are. Why did Dutroux take them? To look at them himself or for the benefit of others? There is another comment by Laetitia that draws the investigators' attention. 'During my stay in that house, I heard Dutroux mention two names: Michel and Jean-Michel. I also heard him say: 'It went to plan'.*6

On the evening of Wednesday, August 14th, 1996, 24 hours before Laetitia's rescue, the 23rd brigade of the judicial police raided Michel Nihoul's apartment at 89 Avenue Jaspar in Saint-Gilles. No one is at home. On a desk in the study, the investigators find two telephone numbers. The first is that of Marc Dutroux; the second is Michel Lelièvre's pager number. The investigators only have a vague description of the tenant as a 'Brussels businessman' and information that he was in permanent telephone contact with Dutroux and Lelièvre in the days leading up to and after the kidnapping. When the line was wiretapped at Michèle Martin's house in Sars-la-Buissière, they heard Nihoul's voice mere hours before their arrest. Later, they found a Post-it note with his phone number at Martin's home. The handwriting is Martin's; the message discloses Nihoul's pseudonym: it was a request to call back 'Jean-Michel de Bruxelles.' *7

Utilising the Zoller/Malicieux system, Dutroux's in-and-outbound telephone calls were also traced. In the days before the kidnapping, the number of telephone contacts between Nihoul and Dutroux intensified notably, calling each other up to five times a day. Some calls are of a brief duration only, while other conversations last nearly half an hour. On August 10th, the day after, Dutroux again calls Nihoul. On Sunday evening, August 11th, Nihoul calls Dutroux. On August 12 and 13, Nihoul is again on the line. A tape recording exists of the last conversation in which Nihoul utters some threats: If Lelièvre double-crosses me, I will know where to find him.*8 Nihoul will forever argue that these calls were only related to his car, which Lelièvre was supposed to have repaired. Nihoul claims this is a provable fact. 'The call was answered by a woman's voice each time. The second time, the lady asked me what the actual purpose of my call was. I answered that it was about my car and wanted to know if it was ready.'*9 The woman who answered the phone was a gendarme. Dutroux's arrest took place in the greatest secrecy, and a patrol car remained on the spot to track the arrivals and leavers at the farm in Sars because, on August 13th, Laetitia had not yet been found.

When the Judiciary police officers search Nihoul's apartment that evening, they do so initially hoping to find Laetitia Delhez, which was regrettably not the case. They rapidly rummaged through the documents found in situ and started to build a picture of the loud-speaking charlatan who claims to have developed a recent cash flow problem. They found insurance policies, car documents, and letters mentioning real estate expertise in the name of Michel Lelièvre. The neighbour from one floor up comes to the door; Annie Bouty, Nihoul's ex-lawyer and ex-girlfriend, has been observing the police intrusion and politely asks what all the fuss is about. 'I'll call him for you,' she suggested to the police commissioner Raymond Drisket.

Nihoul would rather avoid the spotlight that evening. When Drisket gets him on the phone via Bouty, he is only a few kilometres away in Jette with his girlfriend, Marleen De Cockere. Drisket asks Nihoul to present himself for questioning in connection with the disappearance of Laetitia Delhez. Nihoul holds off. 'I have nothing to do with that and, by the way, I am in Zeebrugge now' (a coastal town in the

province of Eastern Flanders, some 100 kilometres away). He agrees with Drisket that he will present himself at the judiciary police office in Brussels on Monday, August 19th. Nihoul will later shrug off why he lied about his actual whereabouts that evening. 'I didn't feel like spending the night with the police.'¹⁰ Michel Nihoul is known as a night owl, but the morning after his apartment search, he rises early and disappears from the face of the earth. Marleen De Cockere sees him depart between seven and eight in the morning. She spent the day at her sister's in Zeebrugge and did not see him again until just before seven in the evening.¹¹ Annie Bouty did not know where he had been on August 15th. She saw him briefly that morning because he came to borrow her car. 'Nihoul looked very tired,' Bouty remembers. 'It was as if he had had a rough night. He told me that he wanted to consult BOB officer Vannesse from Dinant, for whom he was an informer, before being interrogated. However, he failed to meet up with Vannesse.'¹²

Whether Michel Nihoul is the mysterious mandator behind the child abductions or not, one thing is sure. It must have been clear to him in the evening of Wednesday, August 14th, 1996, that Dutroux was in trouble. The search of his flat, the fact that they were searching his place for Laetitia and that in Sars, the telephone was picked up by an unfamiliar woman's voice must have provided sufficient hints that his shoddy friend was suspected of having abducted the girl. Additionally, two Flemish newspapers reported on August 14th that 'some suspects had been detained' in Charleroi in this connection.¹³ In his memoirs, which he wrote in prison at the end of 1997, Nihoul writes that he spent a tranquil day in the village of Agimont near Dinant that Thursday, August 15th, where Bouty's family owned a house. There is no mention in this factual account of an attempt to contact Vannesse. Nihoul pictures it as a carefree sunny day: 'In the morning, I drove to Agimont, as planned. Around 3 PM, I received a call from Annie's office in Brussels, informing me that Mr Drisket had stopped by and wished to meet me soon. The weekend starts well! I reached Drisket on my mobile phone, and he asked about my whereabouts. I tell him. He demands that I come to see him immediately. I responded that we already had an appointment. He holds his ground, and I give in. We meet at 7 PM. At that moment, I had no idea of the case's seriousness. I

heard that Dutroux and Lelièvre had been arrested. Do you think I would have thrown myself into the lion's den if I had anything to do with it?''*14 The investigators themselves have a different version of the events. In this version, Nihoul is said to have told Drisket that he was 'in France' and that not a hair on his head was thinking of returning to Brussels. Only after Drisket threatened Nihoul with an international arrest warrant from investigating judge Connerotte did Nihoul consent to interrogation that evening. At about 7 PM, nearly when Laetitia and Sabine are rescued, he arrives at the judiciary police office. During his first interrogation, Nihoul sets the tone that he will maintain on many subsequent occasions. He wants to charm and command the investigators in equal measure. 'Michel Lelièvre? An incompetent junkie I first met two years ago. I believe he hustles in automobiles.' The portrait of Dutroux is not much more flattering. A sleazeball, says Nihoul, an amateur pervert who harboured the illusion of turning his dilapidated farmhouse into a sex club. 'He spoke of a club for swingers,' Nihoul explains. He asked me for advice when he heard I was an architectural expert. I advised him against it. That is the only time I have been to his house.'*15 Nihoul later specifies that this meeting, followed by a cursory assessment, was dated September 13th 1995.

While Nihoul goes out of his way to distance himself as much as possible from the Charleroi gang, Dutroux and Lelièvre chat about Nihoul at length. Lelièvre is the first to talk about a prostitution network they planned to set up between Belgium and the Eastern Bloc. The recruiter of girls in Slovakia was to be an individual called Yano, the father of their Slovakian friend Eva. The central figure in Belgium, says Lelièvre, is Nihoul. He would contact the bar owners where the girls were to be placed. Dutroux also considers Nihoul an influential pimp. 'Lelièvre put me in touch with him because he was looking for girls for a prostitution network. He wanted Czech and Slovak girls. He knew I had contacts in Slovakia. The deal never materialised. He promised to pay 30,000 francs per girl. He asked for one or two at a time, no more. The chap gave me the impression he could arrange anything. After that, we regularly returned to him, and I learned that he could arrange the paperwork and things like that.'

It is the first and the last time that Dutroux speaks in these terms about his Brussels friend. As fanatically as Dutroux will exonerate him from any involvement in the kidnappings in the following months, on August 24, however, he goes all out on Nihoul: 'He advised me to organise sadomasochistic orgies because that would bring in more money'. Nihoul himself is a genuine fan of SM, says Dutroux.*16 Michèle Martin only starts talking in early September. 'There were frequent and close contacts with Nihoul,' she says. 'Nihoul called unusually often during the weekend of August 9th and 10th. Dutroux visited him in Brussels; Nihoul phoned Dutroux's place in Sars. Nihoul also has contacts in Germany and Slovakia. Marc

told me that he likes women and orgies. I also know that he, Nihoul, supplies drugs to Lelièvre and deals in counterfeit documents as well.' *17 According to Martin, Nihoul visited the house in Marcinelle several times in August 1995, when Julie and Melissa were locked in the basement. She has only one description for Nihoul: 'A real swine.' She observed a peculiar conversation between her husband and Lelièvre shortly before they journeyed to Slovakia in June 1996. 'Marc said to Michel that they needed another girl for Nihoul. I don't know if the girl had to come from Belgium or Slovakia. Presumably, there must be a network.'*18 Confronted with statements like these, after a few days, investigative judge Connerotte considers Nihoul to be target number 1, which corresponds with the general public's opinion. On August 20th 1996, the evening TV news introduced the Belgian public to Virginie Baranyanka and Frédéric Clément de Cléty, Michel Nihoul's two lawyers. She is a person of colour, and he looks the part of a crook from the TV show Miami Vice. 'The only thing they have on my client is a few phone calls with Dutroux,' Baranyanka urges the journalists. 'We will show that it is all about a misunderstanding. Dutroux was supposed to repair mister Nihoul's car and took too long. That is why my client called so often.'*19

Michel Nihoul has long been good friends with Raphael Munoz, owner of Café du Port in Laeken, as well as a garage. The two are best friends. They went horse riding at the riding school in Oppem-Meise, where they owned a horse. Nihoul also held his domicile at the address of the Laeken car mechanic for a while.*20 One could safely assume that Nihoul only went to one place if he had car trouble with his Audi 80: Munoz. In July 1996, Nihoul did indeed have car trouble. 'By observing his car, you could recognise Michel's precarious financial state at the time,' says his friend Léopold Godfraind. 'Everything that could rattle on that automobile did so. Everyone wondered how long it would be before it broke down.'*21 Besides Munoz, Nihoul knew other folks in the automobile business. In the 1980s, as a broadcaster at the independent radio station Radio Activité, he became good friends with the owners of the well-known Brussels towing company Radar, for whom he broadcast commercials. One of his friends at Radar met Nihoul regularly in his local pub, The Dolo.

Anyone who has ever had the misfortune of having had their car towed away in Brussels knows how ruthless firms such as Radar are regarding recovery charges. On July 31st, 1996, around midday, a tow truck from Radar was dispatched to Brussels to tow a blue Audi 80. Michel Lelièvre and Damien Randazzo were in the car. The latter is an unregistered car mechanic from Fleurus, who did not even have a telephone number. Not Munoz, but Randazzo is supposed to repair the Audi 80. 'There is too much to repair for me here,' Randazzo had said that afternoon. The car must be towed to the garage in Fleurus. It becomes apparent that the mechanical issues are serious after a few hundred meters. Near the Namur Gate, Lelièvre and Randazzo grind to a halt. The Audi blocks an intersection and attracts the attention of a police patrol. The officers look at the license plate, find out that it is registered in the name of one Marleen De Cockere and eyeball the two occupants. *22 Lelièvre must show his ID. Since 29 November 1995, he has been listed in the Central Signals Sheet (CSB) of the Belgian police and is summoned right away to explain himself at the nearest police station. 'Lelièvre returned pretty quickly,' remembers De Cockere. 'Policemen accompanied him. The group subsequently visited Nihoul's ex-lawyer, Annie Bouty, in her office. *23 After some discussion, Lelièvre was allowed to leave

without the Audi, which had to remain in the parking lot of Radar. The question arises of what may have possessed Nihoul to entrust his Audi to Lelièvre and, even after this costly incident, to see no reason to make more cost-effective car maintenance arrangements. He already knew that Lelièvre and Randazzo were amateur mechanics. In his autobiography, Nihoul later regales the story of his first encounter with the 'workshop' of Dutroux and Lelièvre in mid-1995, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Charleroi. 'I immediately regretted my visit because it soon became evident from the conversation between Lelièvre and his buddy that he knew as much about vehicle mechanics as I knew about dentistry (...). After ten minutes, I wondered why I came to that forsaken place.'²⁴ Nihoul claims that he entrusted Lelièvre to fix his car for the second time because, at the end of July 1996, Lelièvre still owed Nihoul 15,000 francs, which covered more or less the repair cost. This explanation may be correct, but it conflicts with the high charges of leaving one's car parked at Radar for eleven days. This is how long it took Lelièvre to pick up the vehicle. Nihoul says that he did have to pay the invoice despite his good contacts, which appears correct since the invoice is later found in Marc Dutroux's house.²⁵

A tow truck is required to transport the Audi to Fleurus. Lelièvre knows that Dutroux owns one and informs Nihoul that he will sort things out in the first days of August. It takes until Saturday, August 10th -the day after the kidnapping of Laetitia- before Lelièvre turns up. And this is only to report that Dutroux 'will be there soon', claims Nihoul. Dutroux is a no-show that day. He only comes to tow the car the next day, on August 11th. The story turns even more absurd. What emerges? Damien Randazzo departs on a three-week vacation on August 15th 1996, leaving him just three working days to finish the job. 'This was why I was calling all the time,' Nihoul states later, seemingly aware that Randazzo was about to leave for Italy. 'I wanted to get my car back before August 15th!' Even without all those telephone calls, Nihoul would have had to wait at least another three weeks. The investigators became aware of this when they found Nihoul's Audi 80 in Fleurus at the end of August, and Randazzo still needed to start the repairs. 'One has to admit,' one of the investigators states, 'we had good

reason to question this narrative.' The story about the Audi rattled us even more than the Audi did.'

When the investigators ask Nihoul on August 15th when was the last time he contacted Lelièvre, he first claims that he had not seen him for 'two weeks,' only to

remember a few hours later that Lelièvre had visited him 'last Saturday.'²⁶ It soon becomes clear that Nihoul knows the 'Charleroi scum' better than he wants to admit. While searching Lelièvre's house in Jemeppe-Sur-Sambre on August 22nd, the police found documents belonging to Nihoul.²⁷ That same house had earlier been declared uninhabitable by the authorities, after which Nihoul rushed over from Brussels like a guardian angel to testify to the contrary as an 'expert'. Nihoul also has a bad memory of how many times he met Dutroux. Initially, he keeps it at most three or four times, maybe. He can even produce a list. The first meeting happened after his car trouble in September 1995, when Lelièvre messed up the car repair. During the house valuation in Jemeppe-Sur-Sambre, Dutroux, the owner, was also present. That was the second time. Later, Dutroux and Lelièvre visited Nihoul in Brussels. And then there was that last visit on Sunday, August 11th, when Dutroux brought the tow truck. 'Et voilà, that's it,' says Nihoul.²⁸

Nihoul's list is incomplete. Annie Bouty, during her interrogation on September 9th 1996, mentions a dinner party at her home, to which Nihoul had invited both Dutroux and Lelièvre. She remembered this well because she wasn't fond of those unkempt hoodlums. Bouty remembers that Nihoul was very amiable with this duo. 'I am sure they had further contacts that night before and after the dinner. It is unlikely for Nihoul not to remember this dinner party. "²⁹ Confronted with this statement, Nihoul then admits to recalling the event. Michel Lelièvre adds that he talks about an XTC deal struck in June 1996 at Nihoul's apartment. Nihoul would deliver the XTC tablets, Dutroux would advance the money, and he would sell the drugs. Lelièvre further states that Dutroux and Nihoul discussed plans to deliver thirty guns to Nihoul, who would resell these weapons to an African friend of Bouty's.³⁰ Lelièvre also reveals that he stayed at Annie Bouty's place for ten days sometime in 1995. 'A week on the

sofa,' corrects Bouty, 'At Nihoul's request.' Nihoul's reaction evolves from 'impossible' to 'one night' to 'maybe a little longer'. Another event that Nihoul does not remember initially was a visit by Marc Dutroux and Bernard Weinstein when they knocked on his door in November 1995 to arrange a counterfeit passport. 'If Annie Bouty says so, it must be true,' yields Nihoul.*31 After several interrogations, Nihoul changes tactics. He tells his interrogators that he plans to infiltrate this gang to assist Gérard Vannesse, his buddy at the Dinant BOB. That is why he blew up at Dutroux when he started talking about his plans for a prostitution network. Nihoul admits that he knew about it. 'But I thought this would involve grown-up girls, not minors.'

Shortly after the Dutroux case erupted, the young British drug runner David Walsh is getting all worked up in front of his TV set in his cell in a Brussels prison.

Whenever the overweight man dressed in a suit appears on screen, the urge to pelt his television set with every object in his cell is overwhelming. Walsh is a former inmate with Michel Lelièvre and Casper Flier. He toured Belgium in April 1996 with a cargo of 5,000 XTC pills and 15 kilograms of amphetamines. His client gave him 200,000 francs to smuggle the goods to Norway or Sweden. Along the way, Walsh made other plans. For example, if he sold drugs in Belgium, he would make a substantial extra profit. Walsh decided to meet up with Michel Nihoul, an old acquaintance. He once journeyed to Morocco with Nihoul and Lelièvre to sell a stolen car. Nihoul receives Walsh with open arms. Since the Briton is still a wanted man in Belgium over a fraud suit, he helps him go into hiding in the apartment of Marleen De Cockere.

Nihoul promises Walsh to offload the entire shipment of narcotics within 48 hours so they can pocket a portion of the proceeds. Nihoul, however, acts decidedly differently; he contacts his BOB Vannesse and rats Walsh out. Walsh's arrest becomes a matter for the narcotics division of the Brussels BOB. It takes place on Tuesday, April

23rd 1996, Michel Nihoul's birthday. Nihoul leads the operation nearly by himself. He has Walsh drive behind him through Brussels streets until he reaches a crossroads where he arranges a rendezvous with the BOB. Nihoul stops at a traffic light and ensures Walsh cannot drive off. The BOB officers recover 15 kilograms of amphetamines from his car. And the XTC pills? Gone. Whereas Vannesse's testimony mentions XTC tablets, the Brussels BOB officers do not mention these.*32 And yet, the XTC pills resurface in the Dutroux case. It begins with the first house search of Nihoul's apartment on the evening of August 14th 1996. Annie Bouty, who was seemingly very helpful to the police officers, confessed afterwards that she had secretly concealed two envelopes containing XTC pills, took these to the ground floor and dropped them in Nihoul's mailbox as requested by him, states Bouty after she spoke to him on the phone. Also, the morning after the search, when Nihoul visits her to borrow her car, he is concerned about the pills. 'During a conversation with Marleen De Cockere, he said that the problem was that Lelièvre received (the) pills,' Bouty explains.*33

Michel Lelièvre did indeed receive a thousand XTC pills on Saturday, August 10th 1996, just a few hours after the kidnapping of Laetitia Delhez. At the time of his arrest three days later, he still had six hundred in his possession, which his girlfriend Maryse B. promptly flushed down the toilet. When detectives raid his place, they find another 144. The pills are white and marked with a star. Lelièvre revealed on August 29th that he planned to sell them in the Charleroi party scene and pay 80 francs per pill to Nihoul. The repair of the Audi 80, which would cost about 16,000 francs, was part of the deal. Lelièvre would pay Randazzo (who held the Audi in his garage at the time) with the proceeds of the XTC pills.

Precisely around the time that the enquiry is focussing on the XTC trade, Michel Lelièvre tells his interrogators that he 'had received death threats and 'I better shut up about the affair' - and keeping quiet is pretty much what he will stick to after August 29. 'In May 1996, Nihoul presented us with a batch of XTC pills,' Lelièvre says. 'That was in the period when the plans for the women trafficking operation with Slovakia were beginning to take shape.'*34

Maryse B and a friend also confirmed that Lelièvre received the 1K XCT tablets and distinctly recalled him arranging these in bags of fifty pills each that same day.*35 The kidnapping event and the transfer of the XTC occurring within a few hours' timeframe could be coincidental, of course. In this hypothesis, the case would only involve Lelièvre and Nihoul. But lo and behold: on 22nd August 1996, a batch of XTC pills was also discovered in Marc Dutroux's house. The type of pills was the same: white coloured ones, stamped with a star. Officers of the Brussels BOB financial section found them in a false ceiling of the bathroom of his house in Marcinelle. Dutroux hid them there in a Tupperware box.*36 The pills were delivered to him by Michel Nihoul, says Dutroux.

Following the revelations concerning Operation Othello, this was the last straw. It seemed now, at least to the original investigators, that the Brussels BOB "financed" the kidnapping of Laetitia Delhez. Michel Nihoul was not yet to be registered as a police informant in April 1996. Therefore, he could not have been compensated through the usual official channels for his active contribution to the arrest of David Walsh. Assuming that the BOB did indeed 'compensate' Nihoul by paying no heed to the 5,000 XTC pills, they could not have known that these would be found a few months later in possession of a couple of child abductors. Regardless, the Brussels BOB appeared quite alarmed at the end of August. The Brussels BOB commander Jean-Marie Brabant went to Neufchâteau to pretty much beg investigative judge Connerotte -then still in charge of the kidnapping dossier- not to search his Brussels BOB precinct. Connerotte intended to do precisely that in those early days of his inquiry, specifically because he found out that the Brussels BOB had lied to him when he sent a nationwide probe to all the nation's police forces for any information available on Nihoul and Bouty. The police forces under Brabant replied that they were unaware of the duo. A little later, it turned out that the financial section of the Brussels BOB had previously investigated both the SOS Sahel case and the fraudulent bankruptcy of Annie Bouty et Associés. The exact details of Brabant and Connerotte's discussion are unknown. Still, the investigators agreed that the best forces within the financial section of the Brussels BOB would work exclusively for Bourlet and Connerotte for an indefinite period. And so it panned out. 'In Neufchâteau, they

had little choice at the time,' says one investigator. 'Following the events surrounding Georges Marnette and Georges Zicot, relations with the judiciary police had also soured considerably.'

At first glance, the XTC trade does not amount to phenomenal sums of money. Still, in any case, it clashes head-on with the hypothesis that the telephone contacts between Nihoul, Lelièvre and Dutroux were only related to repairing an Audi 80. If Lelièvre had effectively made a thousand times 80 francs from the sales of the XTC pills, then Michel Nihoul had not lent him 16,000 francs but 80,000. Michel Nihoul is a shrewd negotiator. In and on itself, the notion that Nihoul would have made a 5-fold miscalculation is near-ridiculous. It is equally implausible that he would be unaware of the drug market price. Michel Lelièvre is working with narcotics 24 hours a day but tells the investigators in Neufchâteau in mid-1997 that he wanted to sell the pills for not 80 but.... 20 francs each. This explanation dates from the period when Dutroux, Nihoul and Lelièvre were occasionally allowed to walk together in the Arlon prison and were able to "synchronise" their version of events in the outside prison courtyard. Lelièvre's explanation seems to result from one of these outdoorsy informal chats. Twenty francs for an XTC pill? A few phone calls to narcotics specialists at the Belgian police services make it clear that the average street value of an XTC pill in the summer of 1996 was around 500 francs. Lelièvre knows that, too. When questioned about his drug use in the early days of the investigation, he answered, 'In 1994, I used XTC daily. I paid 500 francs per pill.'³⁷ So, the day after the kidnapping of Laetitia Delhez, the kidnappers collected a drug shipment worth about half a million francs. The murders of Minister of State André Cools and Flemish IVK-veterinarian Karel Van Noppen involved smaller payouts than this. By the way, it is unclear what Dutroux would do with XTC pills except monetise them. He lives like an ascetic. He is a fanatical anti-smoker and does not drink alcohol or use drugs.

'Lelièvre is a liar; I have nothing to do with XTC,' fulminates Michel Nihoul when questioned about the pills on August 29th 1996. 'Lelièvre didn't even come upstairs to the flat with me that afternoon [he refers to the 10th of August]! Where, then, would I have given him those pills?'³⁸ From prison, Walsh

reveals that the XTC was concealed in the spare tyre of his car. Annie Bouty had observed this tyre on Nihoul's desk. Confronted with this revelation, Nihoul admits that Walsh must have left the spare wheel with the XTC pills at Bouty's. Nihoul: 'Lelièvre visited me on August 10th to pick up a paper for my car, which was still held at (the towing company) Radar. He must have then dropped by Bouty's place, and Walsh had to have given him the XTC pills there.'³⁹ The XTC investigation grinds to a dead end at that point. Nihoul accuses others, while others accuse Nihoul. What happened to Michel Nihoul's computer also remains a mystery. Detectives from the Brussels judiciary police determined that following his arrest on August 15, "someone" managed to erase some data files. Additionally, during searches of his apartment, the enquirers thought it bizarre that no fingerprint of Nihoul could be found in his entire apartment. From the remaining computer files, the police officers conclude that Nihoul was in contact with Thierry De Haan, a top executive of the insurance company Royale Belge. It is the same De Haan who played a role in the scam involving the stolen Fabricom truck, which indirectly led to the hostage-taking of the three teens by Dutroux and Weinstein in Jumet.⁴⁰ De Haan was arrested for these acts in September 1996 but just as quickly released.

After their vacation, the offspring-rich V family has resumed the thread of everyday family life. The children start the new school year. A kitchen renovation is underway. The purchase of a new family car is still in the works. Now and then, the family receives a message from the Brussels judiciary police, which is conducting part of the Nihoul investigation. Commissioner Philippe Beneux was their liaison officer. He is the Dutch-speaking right-hand man of Georges Marnette. At the end of September, the V family had an appointment with Beneux to journey to the prison in Arlon for a confrontation with Nihoul behind mirrored glass. Those confrontations were quite an organisation," muses Mrs V. "My husband, my son and I first had to drive to Brussels, after which we left for Arlon with two judiciary police investigators. My husband had to take special leave from work." Mrs V has few fond memories of the first trip. It struck her as bizarre that Benelux seemed to want to prepare her for a letdown during the car journey to Arlon. 'This commissioner told us that they already had enough evidence against Nihoul, that it wouldn't matter too much

should we not recognise him. We looked at each other. 'We'll see for ourselves if we recognise him,' my husband replied.'

Nihoul wrote in his memoir that he never tried to evade any interrogation. He was ready to demonstrate his innocence, even if he should feel poorly.*41 That day, the opposite was apparent; the Flemish family does not get to see Nihoul. 'We sat there waiting in that little room for three hours,' Mrs V recalls. Then they came and told us that Nihoul did not want to leave his cell because he did not feel well, so we returned to Brussels. A short time rumour, we heard a radio news broadcast: "The confrontation between Michel Nihoul and the key witnesses from Bertrix was cancelled because of the witnesses from Flanders having withdrawn their support. Well, there you have it. We protested vehemently, but the police told us not to worry. The report sticks and makes it to nearly all newspapers the next day. Nihoul's lawyer, Virginie Baranyanka, unabashedly declares on the TV news that the witnesses from Bertrix have admitted that they were mistaken. On October 11th, a new attempt at a confrontation between the Flanders family and Nihoul is set up, and this time, successfully. Father, mother and son formally recognise the corpulent chap standing by the pool. 'It was Nihoul, for sure,' declares Mrs V. But this wasn't the end of their input into the inquiry. An official report is to be made about the confrontation. Commissioner Beneux interrogates her.

- It was him—that man I saw at the Bertrix pool. I am one hundred per cent sure.
- How many per cent do you say?
- One hundred per cent.
- One can never be 100% sure, madam. I can't put this in my report*42

Mrs V. is somewhat baffled by the investigator's stance and is coaxed into accepting "a compromise" after discussing percentages: 98 per cent. 'I had never experienced a police confrontation before,' she says. I didn't expect this sort of tactic. Afterwards, I heard from my husband and son that the other investigators didn't discuss whether they were one hundred per cent % sure or otherwise.' The son, Daan's

testimony is the clearest of the three official reports drawn up following the confrontation with the three family members. It states: '.... formally recognises Michel Nihoul as the person who was present in Bertrix on the 9th of August 1996 and who, at the beginning of the afternoon, was leaning against the fence of the athletics track. He was wearing blue trousers and a white long-sleeved shirt.'*43 However, this does not correspond to what the press wrote about the Flemish family. During a confrontation last Saturday, witnesses who thought they saw Nihoul at the disappearance of Laetitia in Bertrix did not recognise him,' writes the Flemish paper Het Nieuwsblad.*44 And when the French-language weekly Le Vif published an extensive Nihoul dossier a year later, it sounded like this: 'A mother of six children claimed to have recognised the man as Nihoul at the playground in Bertrix, but "not with 100% certainty."*45

Weeks pass by. Whenever the V family reads an article about themselves in the press, they are consistently described as having zero credibility or having withdrawn their testimony. On the 28th January 1997, Mrs V is fed up. She calls the cabinet of Minister of Justice Stefaan De Clerck, who inquired in February 1997 with the Prosecutor General of Liège Anne Thily. 'The family is shocked to learn from the press that the witnesses who recognised Nihoul had withdrawn,' says De Clerck, and he insists in his letter that the family should be interviewed anew.*46 This interview occurred on the 5th of March 1997. Father, mother and son repeated their statements, mother V reaffirming: 'If the official reports of the gendarmerie or the judicial police did not show that I recognised Nihoul, then this was due to a misunderstanding with the gendarmerie in Bouillon, considering the language difference between the investigating officers and myself (I do not speak French). I also formally recognised Nihoul at the confrontation through the looking glass. I know that Mr Beneux of the judicial police in Brussels doubted my testimony. However, I was, and still am, categorical to have recognised Nihoul on 09.08.1996 in Bertrix as well as his picture and at the confrontation.'*47

The dismissive media coverage does not decrease, quite the contrary. The press has decided that the family has withdrawn from the investigation, and they shall. One day, Mrs V calls a

Flemish newspaper and gets hold of a journalist who bluntly accuses her that her whole story 'doesn't add up' as 'someone from the Brussels judicial police' had told him. The journalist leaves her with the advice that she should stick to the kitchen sink and the cooking pots.

A feeling of hostility has pursued the family for some time. Their car is followed for miles on a drive home after a confrontation with Michèle Martin. In February, the family suffers from phone terror. 'We called Mr Beneux, who told us not to worry about it.' In the same period, mother V nearly gets run over at a bus stop in front of her house. Following this incident, two men attempt to break into their house. Mother V writes down the license plate number of their getaway car and informs the police but learns nothing more than it was a rented car. 'Eventually, we truly got scared. We have considered several times withdrawing our testimony to get rid of all this misery. We have never accused this Nihoul of having kidnapped that girl. I only know we saw him that afternoon at the Bertrix swimming pool, along with Dutroux.'

Two years later, Philippe Beneux remains adamant that no blame rests on them. He and his men spared no effort on the Nihoul file, he says. To illustrate his point, he opens a desk cabinet filled from top to bottom with folders full of statements from people who once saw Nihoul somewhere. Beneux is convinced that most of these witnesses were overcome by the Dutroux psychosis that reigned at the time. He remains unsurprised by the polemic around the Nihoul investigation, stating: 'In Neufchâteau, they had decided that the commissioners Suys and Drisket would become Marnette's hierarchical superiors. From a purely neutral perspective, there was no issue with that, but knowing Marnette's temperament, I immediately sensed that this would cause major upheaval in Brussels. I think mistakes were made in both directions, but the result was that after Marnette left - with slamming doors, you remember- they only called us in for the dirty work. On one occasion, we drove for hours to take a gentle chap's testimony that he had seen Nihoul "somewhere on a train in 1987." To give you an idea.'

Beneux does not use the word 'punctuality action', but his explanation clarifies that at the end of 1996, the Brussels judiciary police rarely did more than formal requests. 'In my

view, I doubt the usefulness of confrontations with a person whose face appears on television every day and is alleged to be the greatest criminal of all time,' says Beneux. Such was the case with Nihoul at that time. I think I judged mother V correctly. I told her that she could never be one hundred per cent sure and that she should not feel compelled to recognise him. But here was the problem: she did feel obliged. And with her, probably also the other family members. I believe these folks acted truthfully, but a judicial investigation should be based on adequately scrutinising claims and counterclaims. So I methodically recorded what she said, even though I had significant doubts because of what I had learned about the affair in the meantime.*48

There is indeed something the Flemish family does not know. For the day they claim to have seen Michel Nihoul in Bertrix, Friday, August 9th 1996, the man has an alibi like a house. When Michel Nihoul came forward with his alibi for the first time on August 27 -notably eleven days after his arrest- the investigators initially laughed him off. This alibi comes from none other than Michel Vander Elst. This former lawyer was sentenced to eight years in prison by the Brussels Assize Court after the kidnapping of former Prime Minister Vanden Boeynants, among other things, for providing a false alibi to members of the Patrick Haemers gang (who executed the alleged hostage-taking). One is hard-pressed to find a more dubious alibi provider in the entire kingdom of Belgium. Nihoul tells us that he met Vander Elst in prison in 1989, that they became friends and spent virtually the whole day together on the road on that Friday. When Laetitia was abducted in Bertrix, he was at a barbecue in Vander Elst's garden in Linkebeek.*49 'I have not been in Bertrix for twenty years,' says Nihoul. 'That Friday the ninth, I was with Michel Vander Elst practically all day.*50

The day after Nihoul makes this claim, Vander Elst receives an invitation from the judiciary police to present his version of the events. The ex-lawyer accepted the invitation and provided a per-hour description of that Friday, August 9th. In the morning, he says, they met with two executives of the Alken-Maes brewery because Nihoul aspired to take over a Brussels tavern. 'My girlfriend Annie Noël also saw us together,' Vander Elst continues. 'At a quarter to one, we had a rendezvous at the town hall of Ixelles. At one in the afternoon, we went for

dinner in a restaurant on the Ferdinand Cockplein, and at half-past two, we went for a drink in a café along the avenue Winston Churchill.' Vander Elst further mentions Philippe Cravatte, one of the guests at the barbeque. Vander Elst's statements further settle for the detectives Nihoul's whereabouts the two days before August 9th. At that time, Nihoul assisted him and an African moonlight worker in refurbishing an apartment of Vander Elst in the August Lambiottestraat in Schaarbeek.*51 That's what one could call an alibi.

Even before Vander Elst is allowed to leave the police premises that day, they question the two executives from Alken-Maes. They confirmed the story. On Friday, August 9th, 1996, they met with Mr Vander Elst and Mr Nihoul at 11.00 AM.*52 The alibi gains additional weight when an official of the sewage department in Ixelles confirms to have recognised the duo around 12.30 PM at the town hall. It is at least an hour and a half drive from Brussels to Bertrix. With these details in mind, the Flemish family couldn't have spotted Nihoul at the swimming pool that day around 2 PM.

It is Annie Noël's turn to be interrogated. Her memory seems even more honed than that of her partner. She knows that on August 7th, Vander Elst and Nihoul were painting and wallpapering in the August Lambiottestraat. On August 8th, she says, the two men also moved in together. As for August 9th, she echoes hour to hour the same appointments and meeting places as Vander Elst did earlier. 'And in the evening, there was that barbecue.' Present at that barbecue were herself, her two children, Vander Elst, Philippe Cravatte, Nihoul and 'his girlfriend'.*53

Vander Elst undergoes another round of questioning. He recalled that Nihoul was without a car and required a lift wherever they went. At 15h30, Vander Elst dropped him off in front of his apartment in Sint-Gillis. Shortly before that, a cell phone call was made from the car to Marleen De Cockere to invite her to the barbecue. The idea for the barbeque had developed in the afternoon. 'At about eight o'clock in the evening, Nihoul and Bouty arrived there,' says Vander Elst. 'Cravatte did not arrive there until ten o'clock. Nihoul was the first to leave, a little after midnight.'*54 Marleen De Cockere

confirms the barbecue's events and recalls receiving a phone call from Nihoul around 3:15 PM to invite her to the barbecue. The mobile operator Proximus confirmed that Nihoul called De Cockere at 3:15 PM from the Brussels area. Perfect. Yet still, some details need to be added up. According to Vander Elst, Nihoul was accompanied by Annie Bouty at the barbeque, but according to all other testimonies, it was Marleen De Cockere. Philippe Cravatte says Vander Elst invited him to the barbecue 'the beginning of August'.⁵⁵ The others maintain that the idea happened spontaneously that afternoon because of the warm weather. Then there is this tidbit. Nihoul entrusts his Audi to Michel Lelièvre against his better judgment because he was short of liquidity in August 1996, which is also his rationale for the many phone calls to Dutroux. Part of his alibi concerns conversations about taking over the Danish Tavern on Rue du Trône in Ixelles. Few people can take over a fancy establishment while penniless.

In the months and years following his arrest, Belgian citizens determine whether Michel Nihoul is a player in the Dutroux case or not. However, the verification of his alibi proceeds like a common handbag theft. No reasonable attempt is made to discover whether some meat is on the bone of this character's story. There is no trace of any interpretation of the testimony of Philippe Cravatte in the official reports of the Brussels judiciary police. Cravatte is none other than the right-hand man of the Liège businessman Léon Deferm, famous for his role in the Agusta affair when, through his company Trident, he relieved the Italian helicopter manufacturer of the obligation to place half a billion worth of compensation orders with a Belgian company. Many observers remain convinced to this day that the murder of Socialist Party politician André Cools was an indirect consequence of that intervention. Vander Elst, Cravatte, Nihoul... One can safely speak of a barbecue with a peculiar audience.

Could it be that the V family saw Dutroux, Lelièvre and Martin and only imagined Nihoul's presence? Not really. Notwithstanding, the Brussels Judicial police investigators are convinced just a few weeks into their investigation that the family suffered from an overdeveloped imagination. Why? They stuck to the perspective that even the other three could not have been in Bertrix on the afternoon of August 9th. Marc

Dutroux claims that he and Lelièvre only left Marcinelle at 14h30 PM. Their story goes that they ran into engine trouble near Gedinne and stopped by a garage. There, garage owner J.L. was tinkering with his Renault Trafic until 18h30 PM. J.L. confirms that Dutroux called his insurance broker from the garage while he was waiting for the repairs to finish. The existence of this phone call was also retrieved, as was the inquiry records claim. Conclusion: Dutroux and Lelièvre arrived at 19h30 PM in Bertrix, as they claim. And Michèle Martin was not present at all. She can present the tickets with which she boarded the cable car to the citadel of Dinant with her children on the afternoon of August 9th. At the beginning of 1997, the conviction gained ground that police investigator Philippe Beneux had saved the justice system a lot of time and energy by 'unmasking' the Flemish family V.

During the summer vacations of 1997, the V family returned to the Ardennes but experienced no more noteworthy adventures. A few weeks later however, mother V receives a visit from a crew from the (French-speaking Belgian) RTBf channel for an episode of "Au Nom de la Loi" (In The Name of the Law). She agreed to tell her story -anonymously - for this TV broadcast. Once more, the experience is a total letdown for her. The programme was created solely as a song and dance for Michel Nihoul, 'victim of the miscarriage of justice of the century'. Based on a reconstruction of his alibi for August 9th, the family's testimony is once more mercilessly debunked.*56 Neither did the programme's makers keep their word to protect her anonymity by blurring out her face; she notices when confronted in a bakery the following day: 'We saw you on TV last night'. It all becomes too much for Mrs V. With her shopping bag still in hand, she calls the courthouse in Neufchâteau that morning and, in a trembling voice, asks for prosecutor Bourlet. She quickly gets him on the line.

- Mr Bourlet, I will say it right away: we are withdrawing as witnesses.
- Withdrawing? Why?
- We are fed up with all this misery, sir. Nobody takes us seriously when we say strange things are happening around our house. And yesterday on TV... The journalist was very friendly when he came to our home... And then, that programme.

- Withdrawal is a problem, ma'am. We can't just remove your statements from the enquiry. If you genuinely want to retract, there's nothing left to do but to pretend like you've been lying all along.
- Mr Attorney, we are a Christian family! If there is one thing we never do, it is tell a lie!
- 'I know damn well enough anyway,' exclaimed Mrs V. 'It was that day that we went to the pool and then to the evening market.'

The conversation carries on for a while. Just before he wants to end the conversation, Bourlet gets a hunch.

- Where was that night market, anyway?
- In Rochehaut. But we explained all that to the gendarmerie in Bouillon last year.*57

Michel Bourlet himself lives near Rochehaut and is also fond of evening markets. He scratches his scalp for a moment before his face turns white. Not even an hour later, a team of investigators leaves Neufchâteau for Bouillon. They return with a sheet of paper: 'Related: U.V 584.2 - P.RP/Watrisse - Evening market in Rochehaut. Sir, the College of Mayor and Aldermen of the Town of Bouillon, in its session of June 4, 1996, takes note of your letter of May 24, in which you ask to establish an evening market in Rochehaut on Thursday, August 8th, from 5 to 11 PM (...)'.

A trivial administrative notum rarely holds such significance as the one from Mayor Pierret of Bouillon, permitting the organisation of an evening market in Rochehaut. In one fell swoop, the discrepancy between the V family's story and the reality of the Dutroux case disappeared. It is hard to understand why it took a year since the straightforward answer was already on file at the end of 1996. How did the Dutroux case start? The reader might recall that it began with a student in Bertrix who noticed Dutroux's van and wrote down the license plate. The student also swears on his mother's grave that he saw Dutroux' van that early Friday afternoon. The cops had also interviewed him on Dutroux's and Lelièvre's schedule. A moment's deep reflection led him to make a significant correction. He did not see the van in the early afternoon of Friday, the 9th, but he noticed it first on

Thursday, the 8th of August, at the time of the gang's reconnaissance trip. His point of reference was his sister's testimony. She had seen a man urinating in the cloakroom of the swimming pool a few hours before Laetitia's abduction. That van had been there the day before, the student now realised. Marc Dutroux and Michel Lelièvre confessed that, before abducting Laetitia, they had carried out a scouting tour in Bertrix.*58 Dutroux had also stolen a bicycle for his son at that time, Lelièvre remembers.

The gendarme who took the second statement from the V family needed to be corrected about the date of the evening market. 'Yes, what do you want,' Mrs V recollects. 'The gendarmerie in Bouillon told us that the evening market occurred on Friday. Those people should know the town's events better than us, we assumed at the time.' The gendarme's minor oversight had significant consequences for the Nihoul case. The entire investigation surrounding Nihoul's alibi, now anchored on August 8th, would have to be entirely re-scrutinised one year later. The V family will be questioned a total of eleven times. What exactly did they do that day, and who did they see? 'They even asked us what we had bought there,' says Mrs V. 'I remembered this quite well: an Ardennes salami, two T-shirts

and a couple of bottles of local organic farmer's fruit juice. That whole day is engraved in our memory. We witnessed a resounding quarrel between two market vendors. A veranda vendor had driven a fully loaded truck to the highest point of the steep slope and was in danger of capsizing. He was standing on the property of another trader, which triggered a police intervention.'

The investigative team makes further inquiries with the Bouillon police, who corroborate the story of the veranda vendor. Once again, the three family members are shown photographs of the cars and vehicle wrecks from Dutroux's backyard. They pick out Dutroux's Renault Trafic—he had two of them—which they have been admiring in the swimming pool's parking lot. It is the exact vehicle as the one pointed out by the student.

In addition to the Flemish family, seven other witnesses in Bertrix testified that they had seen Nihoul in Bertrix. Some indicated on August 8th, while others still determined the exact day. Mrs M.H. saw Nihoul on the Croix-Mauray square in Bertrix the evening before the abduction. A young lady chef from the nearby campsite saw Nihoul standing on the side of the road a little after midnight next to Dutroux's stationary van. 'We had finished our day job, and I was driving home with friends,' she recounted. We arrived at Herbeumont, near Bertrix, where we spotted the van. We slowed down because it seemed like they had car trouble, allowing me to get a good look at the people beside it. I am particular about one of them. That was Nihoul. I remember this distinctly because the gendarmerie arrived at the campsite to enquire very soon after Laetitia's disappearance. It took until the spring of 1998 for Raymond Drisket and his two remaining colleagues with the courage of despair to carry out a few more searches at Michel Vander Elst's home and in the apartment in Schaarbeek where he and Nihoul were said to have been painting on the 7th and the 8th of August. The task of the investigators is virtually impossible: to find out whether Nihoul was there or not one and a half years after the events. Noël and Vander Elst produced invoices from a Brussels do-it-yourself store. These show paint and wallpaper purchases but do not prove that Nihoul was painting on August 8th, 1996. Vander Elst is not making it easy for the investigators. After the Dutroux case, he left the country to start a hotel project in Gambia. During one of his sporadic visits to Belgium in May 1999, the investigators questioned him and his partner anew. Suddenly, the unbelievable came true. Vander Elst withdraws his earlier statements about the eighth of August but disputes that he made his original statements with malicious intent. This was all based on a minor forgetfulness, he says. 'They asked me at the time sort of between pot and pint where and when I saw Nihoul in the days before the kidnapping,' he explains to the authors. 'I thought we had been painting on August 8th. It seems I was mistaken. During my last interrogation, they called in that African guy who was assisting us. He was categorical; his agenda indicated it was not the seventh and the eighth, but the sixth and the seventh of August that we were there painting with Nihoul. I then told the investigators that if he says so, it must be so. Well, hey, sorry about that*59

In mid-1999, Annie Noël was also suddenly 'quite sure' that Michel Nihoul had been absent during the apartment renovations on August 8th and that he had called to say that he could not attend that day. 'But if this was all so important, then it could have been verified in 1996,' says Vander Elst. 'Could you tell me so many years after the facts what you did on August 8th and 9th 1996, unless it was your wedding or birthday that day?' The Brussels judiciary police reacted irritably by the abandonment of Nihoul's alibi. According to the commentators, Vander Elst has been a lawyer for years and knows better than anyone how far-reaching the consequences of his statements can be. If he now claims that we investigated Nihoul's movements for 7 and 8 August "between pot and pint", he is lying,' declared a member of the judiciary police. 'We spent three full days establishing and checking the exact dates. At that time, there was no question and (Van der Elst) was as formal as he could be: on August 8th, he had been painting with Nihoul. I find this very suspect.'

NOTES:

1. Pseudonym.
2. Interview with Mrs V, September 20, 1997.
3. Interrogation father and mother V, gendarmerie Bouillon, 19 August 1996, PV 100.588 L209.
4. During the interrogation, the investigators show photographs of the suspects. Dutroux, Nihoul and Martin are formally recognised, while about Lelièvre, they are moderately less sure. Interrogations mother, father and Daan V, gendarmerie Bouillon, 22 August 1996, 100.600 L205.
5. Reconstruction is based on conversations with detectives and with mother V.
6. Interrogation Laetitia Delhez, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, PV 100.228 L115.
7. Observations Michèle Martin, BOB Brussels, 23 August 1996, PV 112.281.
8. BOB Brussels, September 4, 1996, PV 112.357.
9. Interrogation Michel Nihoul, National Brigade Judiciary Police, December 19, 1996 PV 10.813 L38.
10. Interrogation of Michel Nihoul, 27 August 1996, GP Arlon, PV 2.233 L491.

11. Interrogation Marleen De Cokere, GP Brussels, August 17, 1996, 37.557 Z16.
12. Interrogation of Annie Bouty, 26 September 1996, GP Brussels, PV 10.505 L2025.
13. De Morgen and Het Belang van Limburg. Both newspapers were informed too late on Tuesday evening about the press embargo declared by prosecutor Bourlet at the last minute.
14. Rumours and Facts, Michel Nihoul, Dark & Light Publication, 1998, page 140.
15. Interrogation Michel Nihoul, national brigade GP, August 15, 1996, PV 10.406 L204.
16. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Bastogne, August 24, 1996, PV 100.230.
17. All these statements date from the first weeks after the arrests of the core trio. As indicated, they unanimously changed their versions from the beginning of September. It was suddenly declared that Nihoul had nothing to do with the entire case of the disappeared girls.
18. Interview of Michèle Martin, September 3, 1996, GP Arlon, PV 2.570 L913.
19. TV newsreels, August 20th, 1996.
20. The property in question is 7 Van Gullickstraat in Laeken. Findings Judicial Police Brussels, 7 October 1996, PV 10.531 L2412. Nihoul says that he only used this address as a mailbox.
21. Interview with Léopold Godfraind, March 4, 1998.
22. The license plate was FBD444.
23. Interrogation Manneen De Cockere, 16 September 1996, GP Brussels, PV 39.144 L1614.
24. Rumours and Facts, Michel Nihoul, Dark & Light Publication, 1998, page 128.
25. Interrogation Michel Nihoul, national brigade GP, December 19, 1996, PV 10.813 L38 and determination BOB Charleroi, September 1, 1996, PV 103.313.
26. Interrogation Michel Nihoul, national brigade GP, August 15, 1996, PV 10.406 L204.
27. BOB Brussels, 24 August 1996, PV 112.649. A street map of Ostend, where An and Eefje were kidnapped, was found in the same house.

28. Interrogation Michel Nihoul, August 29th 96, judiciary police Arlon, PV 2.235 Z11.
29. Interrogation Annie Bouty, September 9, 1996, judiciary police Brussels, PV 38.663 L1251.
30. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, 23 August 1996, report Z23.
31. Interrogation Michel Nihoul, national brigade judiciary police, September 8th, 1996, PV 10.452 z41.
32. Walsh tries to speak to the Brussels BOB officers about the XTC pills from prison, but they show no interest.
33. Interrogation Annie Bouty, judiciary police Brussels, 26th September 1996, PV 10.505 L2025.
34. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, 29th August 1996, PV 2557 Z39.
35. Interrogation Marino S., Neufchâteau BOB, 2nd December 1996, PV 100.590.
36. BOB Brussels, September 4, 1996, PV 112.357.
37. Interrogation of Michel Lelièvre, 6th November 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 116.192.
38. Interrogation of Michel Nihoul, August 29th, 1996, judiciary police Arlon, PV 2.235 Z11.
39. Interrogation Michel Nihoul, national brigade judiciary police, December 20th, 1996, PV 10.815 L3824.
40. Findings judiciary police Brussels, September 23, 1996, PV 41.052 L2040.
41. Rumours and Facts, Michel Nihoul, Dark & Light Publication, 1998, page 174.
42. Reconstruction is based on a conversation with Mrs V on September 20, 1997.
43. Interrogation Daan V, judiciary police Brussels, 12 October 1996, PV 40.670 L279.
44. Het Nieuwsblad 17 October 1996.
45. Le Vif/l'Express, 12 September 1997.
46. Letter Stefaan De Clerck to prosecutor Anne Thily, 14 February 1997, ref. CAB/A1/132/060297/acd.
47. Interrogation father, mother and Daan V, national brigade judiciary police, 5 March 1997, PV 10.165.
48. Interview with Philippe Beneux, June 29, 1999.
49. Vander Elst and Nihoul were simultaneously held in pre-trial detention in Forest in 1989, one because of the kidnapping of VdB, the other because of the abduction of

Nihoul. The other is for the SOS Sahel fraud case. Some witnesses claim that the two men had known each other for some time.

50. Interrogation Michel Nihoul, August 27, 1996, judiciary police Arlon, PV 2.233 L491.
51. Interrogation of Michel Vander Elst, Brussels judiciary police, August 28, 1996, PV's 36,161 and 37,440.
52. Brussels judiciary police interrogated Mr Vandamme and Mr Schoonjans (Alken-Maes) on 28 August 1996, PV 34.379.
53. Interrogation of Annie Noël, Brussels judiciary police, 28 August 1996, PV 34.311.
54. Interrogation of Michel Vander Elst, Brussels judiciary police, August 28, 1996, PV 34. 439.
55. Interrogation of Philippe Cravatte, Brussels judiciary police, August 28, 1996, PV 34.310.
56. Au Nom de la Loi, RTBf television, September 17, 1997.
57. Reconstruction is based on a conversation with Mrs V on September 20, 1997.
58. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, Marche-en-Famenne BOB, August 15, 1996, PV 100.204 and interrogation Marc Dutroux, Brussels BOB, November 5, 1996, PV 116.180.
59. Interview with Michel Vander Elst, June 24, 1999.

6. I found it strange that Mr Marnette was investigating the Dolo, where he also partied.

Owner of The Dolo, December 30th, 1996

My client is a wind seller,' says Michel Nihoul's attorney, Virginie Baranyanka. 'To illustrate: on the phone, he could talk for minutes on end to the dial tone. Now and then, he would throw in "yes minister, no minister". Edouard Nihoul, Brussels Liberal Party politician and purveyor of pies and pastries to the Belgian Court, had similar experiences. At the end of 1996, the pastry chef shouted from the rooftops that he had no family connection, but the gossip spread by Michel Nihoul himself proved ineradicable. His shop window in the upmarket Avenue Louise was pelted with tomatoes and eggs. A driver with a truck loaded with potatoes reversed into the store. In mid-1997, the business closes its doors permanently. One of its last significant orders was a birthday cake for the Belgian monarch. A rhubarb cake, a nostalgic Edouard Nihoul reminisces.*1

The police detectives of the "Obelix" cell have never figured out Michel Nihoul.*2 He has been a structural engineer, an impresario, a café owner, a shellfish caterer, an NGO planner and an optician salesman. 'In any major investigation, we create a schematic of a suspect's entourage, with arrows and circles,' comments one of their crime analysts. 'Most of the time, this provides an overview of the subject matter. With Nihoul, the exact opposite happened. A gigantic spider web emerged, typically only appearing when one screens an entire gang. In this case, it was a giant tangle of wires: lawyers and high dignitaries, policemen and prostitutes, scrap dealers, magistrates, drug dealers... And this is scattered in all four cardinal directions of the country.

When Michel Nihoul was born in Verviers on April 23rd, 1941, the youngest son in a modest family, his dad worked as bureau chief in a textile factory. His mother was a housewife. Until eighteen, the children were sent to bed at ten o'clock at night. Michel was a regular, well-behaved boy. On the talkative side, though. He led a humdrum existence in the early sixties as a

house decorator. At the weekends, he roamed the casino's roulette tables in Middelkerke. 'His father had become a croupier', says an erstwhile acquaintance. Michel liked to pretend and presented himself as a journalist on the (Belgian French) channel RTBf.*3 In reality, he was replenishing the shelves at the Grand Bazar supermarket in Liège or making a living as a truck driver. Finding a job is never a problem for Nihoul, but keeping one is. In the 1960s, he opened the discotheque "Le Truc" in Spa. He claimed it was "the place to be" and "the competition's venues emptied". 'All the celebrities, actors and erstwhile celebrities practically made it their second home,' he says.*4

Nihoul's self-proclaimed success story is short-lived, as revealed by his accumulated convictions over the years. In 1973, he received his first conviction for fraudulent bankruptcy, repeated abuse of trust, swindling and writing bad checks. A year later, on March 3rd, 1974, he was declared bankrupt as the sole director of United Corporation. He would only serve two months thanks to a royal pardon of the sentence he received in 1973, one year in prison with four months suspended.*5 Pursued by his creditors, Nihoul moved to Brussels, where he accumulated one bankruptcy after another.*6 He used frontmen to quickly set up new companies as an interior decorator, legal advisor, and real estate agent. Soon enough, Nihoul was declared personally bankrupt by the Brussels commercial court for a third time in September 1980. A new conviction for fraudulent bankruptcy follows in the same year. Nevertheless, this does not prevent him from immediately founding two other companies: Bio Plantal and Bio Clinic. These companies went bankrupt in 1982. 'This is the kind of character Nihoul is, living off the backs of others', describes his Dutch business partner Casper Flier in September 1996 in an interview with the weekly *Vrij Nederland*. 'And when Jean-Michel starts to drink, he becomes annoying, common and vulgar. He's always going on about sex rather than having it.' Another of Nihoul's short-lived business partners is Jacques VK, who worked for a while as a courier in Nihoul's seafood companies. 'He called himself a shellfish merchant', the courier recalls. 'I drove an hour for two hundred and fifty francs through Brussels with a trunk full of

mussels. The stench in my car was sickening. He didn't have money to install a proper trunk to transport the fish.'

Despite his business venture debacles, Nihoul soon discovers the secret to climbing the success ladder. His motto is: 'As long as you have connections.' In 1974, he had a faithful encounter with Annie Bouty.*7 The least that can be said about her is that she has connections. She began her law career as an intern at Jacques Marres, specialising in Zairean affairs and counsel to ex-president Mobutu Sese Seko. Bouty will later specialise in African clientele. She knows people in governmental administrations, cabinets, parliaments and embassies, as well as in the banking industry and football/soccer circles. Nihoul himself quickly finds his stride in the Belgian capital. The eighties were the glory years of independent radio stations.

The Etterbeek-based channel Radio Activité became his springboard. In his programs, he lends a platform to individuals ranging from local politicians to sex workers. In the evening, with his newfangled popularity as a DJ, he surrounded himself with an entourage of young people and artists, for whom he organised parties in the Etterbeek municipal hall De Gerlache.

Michel Nihoul is very capable of captivating an audience. With him around, there are always bundles of laughs abound. Backstage at his chanson festivals, he entertains French celebrities for whom the teenage audience falls into a swoon. Between cognac and cigar, he revealed to crooner Claude Barzotti his ambitious plan to establish his radio station "with even more appeal" It is not precisely clear how Nihoul managed to convince the singer to lend him 550,000 francs. Still, it was not long before radio station JMB - 'Jean-Michel Bruxelles' - was launched. Barzotti never saw his money again, made another attempt in court, and won the case, but heard nothing more from Nihoul.*8.

Radio JMB broadcasts from the twenty-seventh floor of the Brussels' Rogier Tower. At that time, One floor below housed the PRL headquarters (Parti réformateur libéral). Nihoul quickly became a familiar face in the Belgian French-speaking

Liberal Party, where Justice Minister Jean Gol was unassailable at the time. Nihoul has no true outspoken political convictions, having established numerous friends in the Brussels PSC (Parti social-chretien). Lawyer-politician Philippe Deleuze has been a personal friend since the late 1970s.*9 Deleuze holds numerous mandates in the PSC. As a solicitor, he defends the interests of the PSC in the building society La vie Laekenoise.*10 Under the wings of former Prime Minister Paul Vanden Boeynants, he experiences heydays. He is entrusted with controlling the bank accounts of the NGO Tentoonstellingspark of the Heysel and becomes chairman of the Public Loan Office (the 'Berg van Barmhartigheid').

These are extraordinary times. The independent 'Cepic' power core has the upper hand within the Brussels PSC. Within the College of Aldermen, the half-senile French Belgian Socialist Party mayor Hervé Brouhon is no match for Van den Boeynants, who pulls all the strings behind the scenes. Deleuze is also chairman of the non-profit organisation Tentoonstellingspark. The latter manages the city's most lucrative properties -especially at the Heysel- like a cartel. Billions pass through its accounts, and there is little or no oversight. No public administration laws apply to the people who live in this biosphere. Hustling has become the norm. Edouard Nihoul, the unfortunate pastry chef, was chairman of the Brussels Cepic at the time.*11 He claims his disgraced namesake was a party organiser for Paul Vanden Boeynants and his girlfriend, Viviane Baro. 'Michel Nihoul assisted during their electoral campaigns. VdB couldn't stand the sight of him at one point. In Michel Nihoul's book, I read that he now denies that he ever had anything to do with Vanden Boeynants. I have to laugh at that.'*12

Philippe Deleuze was forced into resignation as president of the Public Lending Office in mid-1992 after complaints surfaced of his tampering with the accounts. These events spell the end of his political career. A year later, he was arrested for fraud and embezzlement in the real estate market.*13 Deleuze did not face challenges of this nature earlier in his career when, in the second half of the 1980s, he and Michel Nihoul set up a small business in the legal sector. Their clientele consisted of Nigerian asylum seekers and

prisoners. Their expertise was to hold "interventions" at the Ministry of Justice, specialising in conditional releases, residency permits and judicial pardons. First, under cover of the company Nihoul et Associés and later of the non-profit organisation Cadreco, founded together with Annie Bouty.*14 'Thanks to my contacts at the Ministry of Justice, I could progress several parole files for lawyers, especially for Philippe Deleuze,' Nihoul explained later. 'I got paid for that. (...) The lawyer prepared the file. Then I typed up the request on letterhead with my name in the header and had the file followed up. Payment was always in cash. I had to handle about twenty files, which earned me about half a million francs. It lasted as long as the PRL was in power.'*15

A stack of papers found in Annie Bouty's basement in late 1996 contains correspondence with the Justice Department in the 1980s. In a letter dated January 21st, 1987, Nihoul thanked Jean-Claude Godfroid, administrative director of the Immigration Department, for his various interventions. According to Nihoul, it was mainly this Godfroid who contributed to the success of his legal business. 'I knew him through Minister Gol, his persattaché Burstin, and the sister of Godfroid, who was the director of the "Office des Propriétaires."*16 When Godfroid is first questioned, he initially denies everything: until the Dutroux case, he has never heard of this Nihoul. After hours of interrogation, Godfroid remembers meeting Annie Bouty a few times. When the investigators present him with some letters, he begins to fumble. 'It is possible that I responded to Nihoul without knowing it.'*17

The pile of documents found in Annie Bouty's basement includes a file on Francis Osubu. In a letter dated November 5th, 1987, Nihoul asked Godfroid to intervene on behalf of this Nigerian national against whom deportation proceedings are pending. Osubu arrived in Belgium in 1983. He is one of the hundreds of Nigerians who knocked on Bouty's door upon their arrival in Belgium. 'In the mid-1980s, the name of Annie Bouty was on the lips of every Nigerian who landed in Zaventem,' Casper Flier later testified. Flier was part of the non-profit organisation Cadreco. Bouty had connections with the Nigerian government, which considered her a kind of mum.

Many Africans came to Belgium on a student visa. We earned between ten thousand and twenty thousand francs per visa.*18

The educational institution with which Cadreco mostly collaborated is the Antwerp-based European University, accused in 1997 of nothing more than a "diploma factory" and which incomprehensibly benefited from the backing of several prominent CVP politicians.

Some ex-students testified that education was a big business. One could attend courses, but this was surplus to requirements to obtaining a diploma. Francis Osubu is one of the Nigerians who enrol in this "university". A surprising number of lawyers fight this guy's corner: Annie Bouty, Philippe Deleuze and Marc Van Vlaanderen, all linked to Cadreco. They deploy a baffling level of effort to keep Osubu in Belgium, the second Verwilghen committee later stated in their report, stating their puzzlement about his particular dossier.*19 On January 16th 1991, he married a Belgian mother with three children before being jailed for eight years for the rape of his Belgian spouse's underaged daughter. The entire Nihoul/Bouty clan made enormous efforts to come to the aid of this paedophile immigrant.

Nihoul showed creativity in other areas, too, such as election campaigns. From 1982 onwards, he helped pave the political way with festive events and fundraisers for some Brussels lawyers from the right wing of the PSC, among others. He organised parties for lawyer Jean-Paul Dumont in the restaurant Les Marronniers. He introduced Philippe Deleuze to the city council with the slogan "Tour une ville heureuse, votez Deleuze", which he probably came up with at the bar.*20 In the lawyer community around Dumont, Nihoul also met Didier de Quévy from Uccle, Dutroux's lawyer, in 1989. According to the weekly magazine Humo, the first meeting between Nihoul and De Quévy dates to the early 1980s. Philippe Deleuze allegedly asked De Quévy to play on Michel Nihoul's soccer team, JMB-Fortis.*21

After his breakup with Annie Bouty in 1982, Michel Nihoul runs into the charming Marleen De Cockere during a sex party in the Rue des Atrebatas. Together, they open the club Le Clin

d'Oeil on the Sablon in Brussels. It was a tavern where Brussels met,' says De Cockere.*22 What is meant by 'the whole of Brussels' is unclear. One of the regulars in Le Clin d'Oeil was Patrick Haemers, the future robber of money transports and kidnapper of Van den Boeynants. At the time, he made nightlife unsafe together with some rich kids and acted as a money courier for several top officials from the business and political PSC entourage. Nihoul is also an old acquaintance of Patrick's father, Achilles Haemers, whom he got to know in 1974 in the society Confortex and later will rub shoulders with many times in his local, The Dolo.*23 Nihoul is a familiar face in the same bars as notorious Brussels crime scene members: Madani Bouhouche, Robert Beijer, Jean Bultot, Frédéric Godfroid. Nihoul also had intimate contacts with another well-known underworld figure in Brussels, Rachid Errahmani. The prosecutor's office in Neufchâteau holds soDrpictures showing Errahmani, Nihoul and Philippe Deleuze. Errahmani, nicknamed Le Prince, was murdered in Rouppe Square by a night watchman at a hotel. At the time, he was linked by several witnesses to sex parties with minors.

The café Le Clin d'Oeil was indirectly financed by the Centre Médical de l'Est (CME), a Liège hospital project. This affair sealed the end of the relationship between Nihoul and Bouty. She falls for the charms of Dr Guffens, CME general manager, who gets convicted on December 18th, 1981, by the disciplinary court of Liège for embezzlement of CME money, which he claimed had been used to bribe some Partie Socialiste executives. Nihoul manages to convince Guffens to appeal his sentence and fund him 5 million francs to bribe the counsels of the Court of Appeal. Guffens takes the bait, and Nihoul withdraws the money from an account in Switzerland and opens his cafe. Guffens received an even harsher sentence on appeal. The whole affair later attracts the attention of the Verwilghen Commission. The commission examines the ruling by which the Brussewhichcommercial court declared the bankruptcy of the charity SOS Sahel, which Nihoul took over on May 11th, 1989. On the list of claims, the commission also found the sum of 5 million francs that Nihoul still owed Guffens. This looks like a straightforward technique to get rid of large personal debts', says the commission, determining that the case 'needs further investigation'. This is because 'the

president of the chamber of the commercial court which delivered the verdict may well have been a good friend of Michel Nihoul.*24

There are fewer cumbersome tasks imaginable for a police officer than interrogating Nihoul. No matter how frail and vulnerable he presents himself during public appearances, he is upbeat and self-confident when under interrogation. Regardless of the questions, he treats the situation like it's all a bit of a farce. 'Have I already told you about Doudou?' he states on October 10th 1996. Doudou turned out to be a lawyer, a loyal customer of The Dolo and a sex addict. 'He had just applied for the position of magistrate,' Nihoul subtly reveals before launching into a punchy story about the day he discovered that Doudou - 'his real name currently escapes me' - was a S&M devotee and regularly sought out the services of Roxanne, a transvestite who recorded his exploits on video. One day, Doudou paid 25,000 francs to be locked up, handcuffed in a cage for half a day.*25

At times, Nihoul's jokes and antics seem to have no purpose but to drive the interrogators around the bend. When they subsequently looked into Roxanne's video circuit, Nihoul claimed some scenes were so extreme that they made the cameraman throw up, leading them to yet another dead end. It is Nihoul himself who started talking about the Brussels beau monde shortly after his arrest. He enjoys bragging about this scene to his interrogators, who are somewhat unacquainted with this subject.

- So, Les Atrébates was your first experience in the field of sex parties. What were the other places you frequented?
- (The interviewee stands up and jots down a neat list of places he visited on a blackboard). The Dolo was my favourite in this scene; it was a headquarters for me. In addition, chronologically, I also visited La Piscine in Etterbeek, usually on Saturdays. I frequented that establishment twelve times. I also attended a club called Le Trône (...) four times.

When Nihoul sits down ten minutes later, the board contains about twenty names of clubs. 'I partied between 1981 and

1994,' he says. And there was, of course, the castle of Faulx-les-Tombes. It was not he who organised sex parties there, but his friend Michel Forgeot, the manager of The Dolo. 'There were two of those evenings, but I only participated once. Then again, there were two hundred people. Imagine one hundred men and one hundred women. I stayed at the bar the entire night. I was completely drunk. During these sex parties, I was not much of an exhibitionist, preferring to remain in the shadows. That night, it was impossible to do so.'*26

Several witnesses tell a different story about the castle, which was owned by the municipality of Etterbeek in this period. They claim that Nihoul was a frequent guest there. He even held residence there for a while with Marleen De Cokere. It was the time of Radio Activité and his brasserie De Gerlache. Several young folks from the radio station accompanied them to Faulx-les-Tombes. 'Rumours abounded about these parties at the castle,' remembers a sound engineer. A telephone operator who worked there as a chambermaid for a brief period recalls that the staff was sent home whenever the sex parties took place.*27 The regular security staff was replaced by the Etterbeek police. In its final report, the Verwilghen Commission spoke of 'a textbook example of the government tolerating and encouraging a standard deterioration.'*28

At the end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997, the Brussels BOB will interview more than twenty former radio station employees. They recall unreal scenes about Faulx-les-Tombes, semen in the curtains, naked women running down the hallway screaming and men chasing after them, a giant cake cut up in slices on the body of a young woman but no children. The investigation surrounding Faulx-les-Tombes ends by drawing the greatest common denominator in the statements -many speak of orgies, but hardly any mention of paedophilia. One of the most striking elements in the dossier was unveiled in March 1997, provided by a real estate agent from Huy. The Commune of Etterbeek entrusted him with selling the castle in 1990. He vividly remembers his first visit to Faulx-les-Tombes. 'In the cellars, mattresses had been left everywhere, and a woman's underwear was still hanging from a chandelier. Municipal workers told me the place had hosted sex parties regularly.' The castle had some features he thought only

existed in fairy tales and chivalric tales: 'Under the castle ran a secret underground passage, connecting the two towers.'*29

The stories about sex parties cause great nervousness following Nihoul's arrest. Mayors, council members and former ministers are embarrassed by old photographs in which they are photographed with Nihoul during a merry binge. Many respond with a press release saying 'they never knew that man'. For his part, Nihoul rattles off many names of political and other dignitaries in the interrogation room: Serge Kubla, Jean-Claude Van Cauwenbergh, Philippe Maystadt, Philippe Moureaux, François-Xavier de Donnée, Léon Defosset, Jean-Louis Thys, André Monteyne, Paul Vanden Boeynants, Viviane Baro, Freddy Thielemans, Francis Burstin... 'And did you know I drove the old Chevrolet of Brussels' Prime Minister Charles Picqué for a while?

Investigating Judge Connerotte will warn the Verwilghen Commission from making too hasty conclusions. The list of names is an amalgam. With most of them, Nihoul probably shook hands fleetingly at some reception, but nothing more. However, traumatised Belgium at the time is only somewhat receptive to nuance. On September 27th 1996, the mayor of Etterbeek, Vincent De Wolf, ordered the closure of The Dolo. The official reason is complaints about night noise, the real reason being the Dutroux case. The media present the case in rather more simplistic terms. The Dolo is not a sex club, but an ordinary café frequented by people who got to know each other in the swinger's milieu. The problem is not that The Dolo is some sinister den of sex and blackmail. The real issue seems to be that the Belgian judiciary has not succeeded in finding police officers who can objectively investigate the clientele of this bar. When the police did search the place in September 1996, they found no incriminating evidence. Except this: the owners had been tipped off in advance by members of the Etterbeek police force.*30

The history of The Dolo began in 1975 when a private club for swingers and partner swapping opened its doors in Etterbeek's 154 rue Atrebaten, in an ordinary home on the second floor. The managers are a couple: Michel Forgeot, a French native, and Dolores Bara. The club is only accessible and familiar to

members -no sign on the door- and operates under different names: ACH, MI-DO, and APV. Nihoul has been a regular there since 1981 and soon becomes good friends with Forgeot and Bara. Forgeot will forever deny that any minors were ever there, claiming they dutifully checked the age of the customers at the entrance. Nevertheless, in 1983, the club was closed down by the Brussels police after a disturbance because of 'incitement to vice offences' ^{*31} The Brussels judiciary police also paid a few visits, but there were no consequences, Michel Forgeot later claims, and this does not surprise him. The Brussels judiciary police commissioner Georges Marnette was one of the regulars in the club during that period, along with his colleague Frans Reyniers. Judiciary police officer Guy Collignon was also a frequent visitor to the establishment. 'I find it rather strange that Mr Marnette investigated The Dolo while he came there to party, says Forgeot. I have personally seen him engaging in sex parties. So, these are not events that I would have been informed about. The same goes for all those other persons I have named participants.'^{*32} Forgeot will later add anecdotally during an interview that the judiciary police officers, upon their arrival, was in the habit of handing him their service weapons so that he could store them safely. During his interrogation by the BOB, the Dolo owner is on a roll. He had enough of the myth that had developed about his establishment. He mentions the names of other customers in Les Atrébates: the former Brussels substitute Claude Leroy, ex-minister Jean Gol and his right-hand man Francis Burstin, a certain Doudou, judge Bernard De Visscher, an internationally known Belgian former cyclist, a singer, some magistrates, three gendarmes, NATO officials and some Etterbeek policemen.

The Dolo opened its doors in Philippe Baucq Street in 1987. Only the most loyal clients moved into the sex club that had become a café. Forgeot mentions the ex-justice of the peace De Visscher, four Etterbeek police officers, the chairman of a commercial court, a high-ranking tax official, a few Judiciary police and BOB officers, lawyer Michel Vander Elst, Achilles Haemers, Marie-Claire De Gieter and Albert Toch. Toch is also a commissioner at the Brussels judiciary police after the Dutroux case broke out, and he is eager to contribute to the

investigation at Neufchâteau. On August 23rd 1996, he was the first to question Forgeot. Yet

Nihoul also knew Toch very well - for over a decade. Toch regularly dropped by Nihoul's place, Le Clin d'Oeil. Nihoul once attempted to play the role of an informant in a drug transaction - which came to nothing. Yet Toch's spontaneous contribution to the investigation shows that Nihoul's part cannot be overestimated. In his trial transcript, Toch talks about splendid oyster supper evenings Nihoul hosted at The Dolo during the winter. According to the same Forgeot, he proclaims Nihoul to be a fantasist and a swinger. However, Toch adds that he was never into young girls. He also directs the detectives of the Obelix cell to look into the Confrérie des Brasseurs.³³ This is a kind of beer society about which Nihoul willingly discloses that membership was mainly arranged at sex parties. It turned out in retrospect that Toch is also a member of that society. When Forgeot reports to the Brussels BOB a few months later for a second interrogation and fires a salvo of names of prominent clients at his interrogators, he does so voluntarily.

'This is becoming quite irregular', reflects detective Christian Dubois when he received another report on November 29th, 1995. It has been going on for a while. Two girls from Bergen - twelve and thirteen years old, respectively- are the next to file a complaint. That morning, as they were walking to school carrying their backpacks, they were trailed by a slow-moving white Mercedes, an older model, with a driver and one passenger riding shotgun. Dubois is an inspector with the La Louvière police. His desk sports a whole stack of similar statements. It started in September, and the witness reports keep coming in, with White Mercedes cars repeatedly. When someone manages to grab the license plate, it turns out to be French. The complaints came from a worried school teacher who noticed someone sitting at the gate taking pictures of the children from one of these cars or from an anxious mom. Dubois has been a police officer long enough to know that he's only getting a fraction of the whole picture. Many kids won't tell their parents because they might conclude their offspring watch too much television. The inspector is worried.

His colleagues laugh at him and speak of an urban legend, hysteria, Little Red Riding Hood and the Bad Wolf. Christian Dubois, however, was not to be deterred. On September 28th 1995, a meeting was held in Cul-des-Sarts with several gendarmerie brigades about the 'white Mercedes cars' problem. They were already aware of similar reports from Mons, La Louvière, and Charleroi. A few weeks later, this impromptu task force had already completed its list of fifteen more testimonies from Couvin, Thuin, Chimay, and Beaumont.

Chief of Police René Michaux of the Charleroi BOB led the meeting in Cul-des-Sarts. Dubois concludes that he is working on something big. His detective instincts did not let him fail; Michaux is the leader of the covert Operation Othello, the gendarmerie's secret hope to track down Julie and Melissa. 'He's the one to stick close to,' Dubois concludes on December 13th. It is a memorable day. That morning, Michaux performed his disastrous search at Marc Dutroux's home in Marcinelle. The BOB officer is not unmoved by what Dubois has to tell him in a hasty phone call. He gets into his car that same afternoon and drives to La Louvière, where Dubois apprises him of the alarming story from one of his sources. This informant is neither Claude Thirault nor gendarme Christophe Pettens. He is entirely unrelated to the string of informants which prompted Operation Othello. According to Dubois' source, a paedophilia network is behind a large number of these testimonies. The official report that Dubois had drawn upon his informant -and of which he provided Michaux with a copy- goes into further detail: "The Mercedes cars observed in the area belong to a network of child smugglers. The base of operations is Schaarbeek, a company supposedly called Asco. They photograph girls and compile a catalogue of potential targets for abduction. The smugglers have six or seven vehicles with fake French license plates. The children are photographed, kidnapped and exported to countries in the former Eastern Bloc or Thailand. The kidnappers are paid 300,000 Belgian francs per child. The children are initially detained in Belgium for a while.'³⁵

Dubois's informant situates Asco at the time -December 1995- in Avenue Fonsny, 'in Schaarbeek'. Dubois had some knowledge of Brussels' geography. Avenue Fonsny is not in

Schaerbeek but in Saint-Gilles, near the South Station. A technicality deems Dubois. He can only do a little more than pass on his information to others with more authority than he does. After all, he is only a policeman in La Louvière.

The Verwilghen Commission would later be surprised again about Michaux's lack of follow-up into these leads. At the time of the conversation with Michaux, however, Dubois had an overwhelming instinct that they had stumbled on the same case together -and independently of each other. Dubois had also learned of the Dutroux case on December 13th. 'I remember Michaux telling me that Dutroux was going to Eastern Bloc countries,' he later explained to the P Committee. 'The sums he mentioned for the kidnappings corresponded to what my informant had told me.' Dubois heard nothing more of the whole affair afterwards. He did not receive any reaction from other police forces or public prosecutors.

'Now I still lie awake at night over this,' says Christian Dubois three years later. I feel responsible. After that, in 1996, I did some research on Marc Dutroux. I was sitting at my desk; I had his address, and I knew his background. I held it in my hands and read. I could feel it in my gut. This was the man we were looking for! I should have purchased a crowbar, brought a shotgun, and broken into that house in Marcinelle by myself, contravening all the rules. And I demolished everything until I found those children. I could have easily lost my job for that. It was worth the risk. I considered it, and I didn't do it. Every time I see pictures of Julie and Melissa, I get a lump in my throat again, and this thought shoots through my head: I should have saved you.*36

Dubois cannot locate Asco in Schaerbeek or elsewhere in Brussels in 1996. He needs more information to connect Marc Dutroux and this secretive company. He receives less and less support. His boss, Commissioner Monique Devodder, never misses an opportunity to ridicule his obsession with the case. She even did this on television in January 1996 in an episode of the TV show "Au Nom de la Loi". 'These are mere rumours', she insists on the subject of the testimonies about child molesters in white Mercedes cars.*37

In early 1996, Dubois is transferred to the General Police Support Service at the Ministry of the Interior in Brussels. From then on, his function was purely supportive. This does

not deter him from searching for additional information about Dutroux in the APSD (Central Crime Database) computer files. He asked himself the question which members of the Verwilghen Commission will ponder a few months later: are the detectives in Liège responsible for the investigation into the disappearance of Julie and Melissa aware of all of the facts which surfaced in Charleroi about Marc Dutroux and the suspicious events of late 1995? On June 18th 1996, Dubois sent a fax to the judicial police commissioner in Liège -Daniel Lamoque- where he again points out the obvious parallels between the data garnered from his informant and the facts they have about Dutroux.*38

But he receives no reaction at all. Lamoque would later defend himself with an argument bordering on delusion. A typographical error had crept into Dubois's fax. Dubois wrote about the gang with the Mercedes that they were targeting "miners" - (male) minors. Lamoque concluded that the reference to "(male) minors" in this fax, the gang seemingly only targeted young boys. Hence, in Lamoque's mind, Dubois' info was not relevant to the Julie and Melissa case.*39 Is Dubois's self-reproach covered in a measure of pathos? After all, there is no evidence of a link between Asco and Marc Dutroux. 'But, damn it, that was just it,' says Christian Dubois. There was a link, but I didn't see it (at the time)!' This presumed connection is portly, from Brussels and jovial, namely Michel Nihoul.

Achats Services Commerces, abbreviated to Asco, was founded on July 2nd, 1991 and settled in Honelles, a small town southwest of Mons, a few kilometres from the French border. The company purchased old cars here and there and exported them to Africa. The founders of Asco are Michel Forgeot, Marleen De Cokere and Jean-Louis Delamotte. Forgeot and De Cokere act as frontmen in this company, as it turns out later. Delamotte is a Frenchman from a family of ironmongers who were part of the Dolo entourage since the late 1970s and counts as one of Michel Nihoul's best friends. Nihoul founded several small companies with Delamotte, including DCN La Maison des Chefs. After receiving several convictions in France for tax fraud, deception and fraudulent bankruptcy, Delamotte emigrated to Belgium. In his book, Nihoul details

the Asco episode. He describes it as one big joke and characterises Delamotte as 'one to whom it is better to show one's backside than one's wallet.' He also writes that he only got to know Delamotte in 1989. However, Nihoul and Delamotte admired each other's backsides in the early 1980s. According to Forgeot, Delamotte was a regular customer in the sex club APV in the rue Atrebatas.*40 APV closed its doors in.... 1983. Thus, It is striking that Nihoul goes to such lengths to distance himself from Delamotte and Asco. The Verwilghen Commission notes that he 'was at least the de facto manager of Asco in 1994.'*41

Was Asco the company Christian Dubois' informant talked about in late 1995? There are clear indications that this was the case. Asco had about five white Mercedes cars, all with French license plates. However, these vehicles were not registered under Asco but in the name of Soparauto, a company owned by Jean-Louis Delamotte, located at the same address as Asco. Asco's commercial activities take place mainly near the Brussels Midi train station. This area was teeming with car dealers. At the time, the largest car market in Belgium occurred once a week. Asco had a garage on Avenue Fonsny,' says Dubois. 'Do you understand now? In 1995, I found a correlation between Dutroux and Nihoul. And this is an investigation into child kidnappers. Am I allowed to be furious now?'

When Asco went bankrupt in late 1994, the trustee was Azélie Gallee. At that time, she was the girlfriend of former notary Jacques Haustrate. It may be a coincidence, but the Brussels BOB came across that name in September 1996 on... a computer disk of Marc Dutroux. They found some diskettes in Marcinelle's house containing part of his administration.*42

Jacques Haustrate is no stranger. He was arrested at the end of 1987 in a case which caused quite a stir at the time, not only because this involved a sum of a hundred million but also because the central figure was a commissioner of the Brussels judiciary police who had turned criminal as well as a substitute of the Brussels public prosecutor's office. The commissioner's name was Frédéric Godfroid, and the magistrate was Claude Leroy. The latter was a regular at The Dolo and Les Atrébates. Godfroid was also Nihoul's nightlife acquaintance. Godfroid's

gang stole the Unerg shares, which the court partially retrieved from Leroy and Haustrate.*43.

There are solid indications that Asco was the tie between the decadent Brussels milieu of Nihoul and Leroy and the criminal entourage of Dutroux. At the end of August 1996, in the house of garage owner Michael Diakostavrianos, detectives found a note from Casper Flier addressed to Michel Lelièvre on April 18th 1994. Flier writes about a 'missed appointment' a few days earlier. The appointment was for Lelièvre to pick up Claude Leroy from prison.*44 'We must avoid this kind of mistake in the future,' writes Flier. Claude Leroy thinks the excitement over his contacts with Nihoul and Lelièvre is exaggerated. He knows them, that's correct. He met Lelièvre and Flier in prison, he says.*45 They offered him, entirely voluntarily, to support him after his release. After his release, Annie Bouty arranged an apartment at 47 rue Rasyon in Schaerbeek as a domicile. This is an address where many figures from the merry gang around Nihoul and Bouty have found refuge over the years: from some African footballers to Flier, Leroy and Alexis Alewaeters, convicted in the trial regarding cocaine and sex parties in the Mirano club. Could this address in Schaerbeek be why Dubois's informant located Avenue Fonsny in the wrong municipality of Brussels? Flier's note to Lelièvre is quite intriguing. It does not appear to be an ordinary favour to a man they find sympathetic. 'It is of prime importance that we assist Leroy,' Flier writes. A new appointment with the ex-substitute has been arranged at the Midi train station in Brussels.*46

Belgium is a small country. Making all these connections is a somewhat gratuitous activity. It is inconceivable, for example, that in the small town of Honnelles, one would not have noticed the coming and going of suspicious individuals trading in young women - or children. But this is precisely the point: by early 1994, Honnelles police officers were already watching the shady figures involved in Asco.

As soon as Nihoul's arrest occurred, local police officer Eric Moulard and his colleagues resurrected the 1994 file. They sent it to Neufchâteau and appealed to the local populace to obtain as much additional information as possible. 'A local newspaper even published this appeal with a photo of Nihoul,' Eric Moulard explains. But that didn't precisely yield great

results. We only took a single testimony. In the end, we decided to knock on the door of all the houses in the village, so we got enough information together to submit about fifty official reports.'⁴⁷

This information is quite intriguing. None of the testimonies mentions Marc Dutroux, but several residents of Honnelles state that they saw Michèle Martin, Michel Lelièvre and Bernard Weinstein in or around the Asco building on several occasions. Judging by some testimonies, it wasn't merely cars being traded there. 'In the café Le Pigenonnier, Nihoul usually paid with five thousand franc notes,' one of them recalls. 'After the bankruptcy of Asco, five mattresses were found in the building.' The current tenant confirms: 'I thought it was quite strange that I didn't just discover these mattresses but also found baby milk there. Young girls of African origin always surrounded Nihoul.' Other witnesses confirm his testimony. 'Those women were staying in that Asco building,' says a resident, 'they were foreign women. They looked like they were in transit there.' As it turns out, there was also an entire dispute with a neighbour in Honnelles because Delamotte and Nihoul had dug a gigantic pit on the company premises, which they filled with garbage bags and then covered over, according to several residents, including the next-door neighbour. Our verifications show that no excavations were ever carried out in Honnelles.

NOTES:

1. Interview Edouard Nihoul, De Morgen, August 20, 1998.
2. Particular Investigation Unit at the 23rd Brigade of the Judicial Police.
3. Interrogation Philippe Bouveroux, February 28th, 1997, GP Brussels, PV 10.168 Z218.
4. Rumours and Facts, Michel Nihoul, Dark & Light Publication, 1998.
5. The sentence was confirmed in 1976 by the Brussels Court of Appeal.
6. To continue his business activities, Michel Nihoul began signing all his documents with Jean-Michel instead of Michel in 1987. Using the initials JM, he created confusion with his son 'Jean-Marc'.
7. Nihoul already had an unsuccessful marriage with hairdresser Adrienne G., with whom he had three children.
8. Interrogation Claude Barzotti, 13 November 1996, GP Brussels, pv 43.568 L3109.

9. The meeting takes place through Annie Bouty, Philippe Deleuze's old study companion, with whom she worked in the same office for a while.
10. Deleuze also sits on the boards of directors of the Brussels wholesale market (the Early Market), the Animation Committee' for Brussels North, the Brussels Committee for School Meals, the Royal Park Theatre, the Baths of Brussels, the International Tourism Office, the Family Assistance Office, and several sports associations.
11. Edouard Nihoul later made the switch to the PRL.
12. Interview with Edouard Nihoul, August 19, 1998.
13. Deleuze and the real estate broker Jean Lefort embezzled some 50 million francs, defrauded clients, and made documents disappear. On June 27th 1996, the Brussels correctional court sentenced Deleuze to 30 months of suspended imprisonment.
14. Cabinet de droit et conciliation.
15. Interrogation of Michel Nihoul, October 10th 1996, Brussels judicial police, PV 10.547 L2332.
16. Interrogation of Michel Nihoul, October 13th 1996, judicial police National Brigade, PV 10.550 L2437
17. Interrogation of J. Godfroid, November 8, 1996, 23rd brigade judicial police, PV 10.646 L3148 L3149.
18. 'Les bonnes affaires africaines d'Annie Bouty,' Télé Moustique, 19 December 1996.
19. Second final report commission-Verwilghen, 5.1.5. Nihoul's circle and residence permit for aliens.
20. Dumont later acts for Nihoul as a lawyer in the SOS Sahel lawsuit, along with Martial Lancaster.
21. Humo, February 18th, 1997.
22. Interrogation of Marleen De Cocker, September 16, 1996, GP Brussels, PV 39.144 L1614.
23. Interrogation of Michel Nihoul, September 24, 1996, 23rd brigade GP, PV 10.461 L1870.
24. It concerns L., a client of the Etterbeek club The Dolo—second final report Verwilghen commission, 5.1.3.

25. Doudou
was indeed a candidate for the magistrate position but still needs
to be appointed.
26. Interrogatio
n Michel Nihoul, October 10th, 1996, national brigade GP, PV
10.547 L2332.
27. Interrogatio
n of Sandrine M., BOB Brussels, 15 November 1996, PV 117.102.
28. Second
final report Verwilghen Commission, Section 3.1.2.3.
29. Interrogatio
n Pierre Jamar, March 24th 1997, BOB Brussels, PV 150.719. The
castle was sold for 27 million francs to a Flemish businessman.
30. The
Verwilghen Commission notes this in its second final report.
31. The
operators were initially acquitted but were convicted on appeal on
April 15th, 1988.
32. Interrogatio
n of Michel Forgeot, December 30th 1996, BOB Brussels, PV
119.249.
33. Interrogatio
n of Michel Forgeot, August 23rd, 1996, GP Brussels, PV 38.352
L424.
34. La Louvière
police, 29 November 1995, PV 6304.
35. La Louvière
police, December 13, 1995.
36. Interview
with Christian Dubois, March 19th 1999.
37. In section
3.1.8 of its second final report, the Verwilghen Commission
discusses Mr. Dubois's information, presenting it as suspicious
instead of using it.
38. Fax
Christian Dubois to GP Commissioner Daniel Lamoque, June 18,
1996, ref. 1P60.
39. And he also
adds: 'The facts and the cars used did not correspond.'
Interrogation Daniel Laoque, Committee P, November 27th 1996.
40. Interrogatio
n Michel Forgeot, GP Brussels, August 23rd 1996, PV 38.352
41. .Section
4.4.5 contains the second final report of the Verwilghen Committee.
The Committee referred to the Mons GP's interrogation of Michel
Nihoul on December 11th, 1995.
42. Establishm
ents BOB Brussels, 4 September 1996, PV 113.124.

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| 43. | Haustrate
and Leroy were acquitted in 1993 by the Brussels disciplinary
court. The recovery of the stolen shares was considered a proven
fact. Still, because the investigation had dragged on for too long,
the facts had already lapsed under the statute of limitations. |
| 44. | After the
Unerg affair, the ex-magistrate went from one fraud investigation to
the next and spent some time in prison in Vorst. |
| 45. | Interrogatio
n of Claude Leroy, Brussels judiciary police, 20th November 1996,
PV 43.569. |
| 46. | Conclusions
BOB Brussels, 29 August 1996, PV 112.861. |
| 47. | 'La piste
des Mercedes blanches', Télé Moustique, 10 February 1997 |

3 Autumn 1996

X1 Calls In

1. 'I hope you realise what you're getting into.'

X1, 19th September 1996.

Judging by the front pages of the newspapers, the discovery of the remains of An Marchal and Eefje Lambrecks has brought the country close to the emotional pain threshold. It is Wednesday, September 4th, 1996. In Neufchâteau, investigative judges Bourlet and Connerotte do not allow themselves or their police officers any time to rest. A wave of new arrests is imminent on two fronts. In Charleroi, the investigation focuses on the milieu of vehicle fraud and, more specifically, on judicial police inspector Georges Zicot. In Brussels, former business associates of Michel Nihoul can expect a visit from the investigators. That day, Connerotte has an interview with gendarme Patriek De Baets. The position of the Brussels police officer in the Neufchâteau investigation is somewhat that of the fifth wheel on the wagon. Aided by a few colleagues, De Baets has got his teeth into the alleged financial network around Marc Dutroux, but they quickly conclude this investigative track. Either Dutroux is a small-time hustler or a big one who leaves little or no trace.

De Baets can boast an eventful track record in the gendarmerie. At the beginning of the 1980s, he belonged to a small group of pioneers in the fight against tax fraud. The Kirschen case, Stella Ártois, Feluy, Assubel... These are only a few of the many emotionally charged cases that these Don Quixotes of the gendarmerie, sometimes supported by the Special Tax Inspectorate (BBI), successfully concluded. At the gendarmerie level, De Baets is the 'chief' of the financial investigators. He became good friends with BBI boss Marcel Lamy and was widely praised by some magistrates who built their careers on his successes. In 1987, De Baets got what he deserved. He joined the Brussels BOB as head of the third Criminal Investigation Section (3KOS), usually called 'third SRC' in police jargon.

For the 3KOS, the fight against white-collar crime becomes a hobbyhorse. The general staff, always favouring some competition with the judicial police, thinks it's all good. De Baets and his men take unlimited pleasure in entering the homes of the big names in the financial world armed with a search warrant and turning their offices upside down. Baron de Bonvoisin, the French PDG Pineau-Valencienne and rail

boss Etienne Schouppe are among some Belgian bigwigs who have experienced this treatment.

One of the biggest successes of the 3KOS remains the elimination of the criminal network of subcontractors around the Hainaut-based godfather Carmelo Bongiorno. The speciality of the 3KOS people means that they are almost constantly confronted with the same circles of high finance, false nobility and political fraudsters. The lawyers they must deal with are often the same: Jean-Paul Dumont and his cohorts are always present in the roll call of these kinds of affairs. Baron de Bonvoisin and his stooges are also omnipresent in the files of the 3KOS. Where many others failed before him, De Baets succeeded. Thanks to the Cidep case, he became the first and, so far, the only police officer to remain immune to the bottomless bag of tricks with which de Bonvoisin managed to dodge every legal action against him over the years.*1

Bourlet and Connerotte know De Baets very well. Much like themselves, adjutant De Baets gets to hear more often than he would like that he works like a 'cowboy'. His nickname also evokes similarities with the halo hanging over the heads of the two magistrates -although De Baets only owes it to his hair colour. People call him 'the white one'. Bourlet and Connerotte wanted to involve him in the Dutroux case at all costs because it was -again- the 3KOS who, in 1992, on the fringes of the investigation into the murder of Minister of State André Cools, discovered the trail of stolen securities.

It is impossible to complete a meeting with Connerotte uninterrupted; De Baets learns that Wednesday afternoon. The investigating judge cannot finish a sentence before the telephone rings. This time is no different. 'Interesting, yes, yes,' says Connerotte repeatedly, in a nervous attempt to keep each conversation as concise as possible, but on the other hand, unable to contain his curiosity. De Baets could tell from the gibberish that the interlocutor was a Dutch-speaking woman who tried her very best to speak French and that Connerotte, for his part, wanted to show that he knew a few words of Dutch. 'One moment,' De Baets heard him sigh before pushing the receiver into his hands. The problem, De Baets

understood, was that the woman was trying to dictate an address in Ghent. She introduces herself to De Baets as 'Tania from Ghent'. The way she pronounces her address, with a sharp "a" common in a typical Ghent-Flemish dialect, makes him understand that this conversation could have taken Connerotte a while to complete, if at all... He also receives some additional context from Tania. She says she knows someone who has been a victim of 'the network around Michel Nihoul'. De Baets hands Connerotte some notes. 'Interesting', Connerotte responds.*2 Three days later, on Saturday 7th September 1996, De Baets is summoned to Neufchâteau, Connerotte's base of operations. Connerotte hands him a notebook numbered "62 bis". Assignment: Interrogate Tania V. in Ghent. 'Nihoul?' De Baets asks with a measure of surprise. 'Wasn't the agreement that the judicial police would look into the Nihoul track?' No, nods Connerotte. He believes there have been too many incidents involving Commissioner Marnette in only a few days. The seemingly false report by Marnette about Jean-Paul Raemaekers is why De Baets and three of his colleagues had to travel to Neufchâteau that day. And there is more. During Nihoul's lawyer Annie Bouty's first police interrogation, she suddenly mentioned two nocturnal phone calls she had recently made with...Georges Marnette.*3 What exactly was said then is a well-kept secret. Of course, making a phone call is not a criminal offence in Belgium - and, incidentally, it was Marnette's subordinates who recorded Bouty's statement -but it did not stop there. Shortly after Bouty's arrest, Marnette was approached by Brussels' public prosecutor, Benoit Dejemeppe. Dejemeppe asked Marnette to check the grounds for the arrest and what she had to say. It was not Marnette but the national judicial police commissioner Eddy Suys who informed Connerotte about Dejemeppe's "snooping".*4 'That's why I prefer you to handle this one,' said Connerotte. On Monday, September 9th, adjutant Patriek De Baets and master sergeant Philippe Hupez set off.

They sense her bewilderment. Tania V later explains that she intuitively associates the acronym "BOB" with crew-cut coppers who photograph left-wing protesters from their Renault 4 cars. 'You can only talk to Connerotte or Bourlet,' her friend had urged her. That is why, on September 4th, Tania says she has been inundating the telephone exchange of the

Palace of Justice in Neufchâteau for hours since the morning. 'When I later heard that I would have called deliberately at a time when De Baerecountedn front of me and that we knew each other, that everything was a set-up, I have to laugh out loud,' says Tania V.*5

She starts shyly, displaying a somewhat helpless demeanour. She speaks softly. She met her friend -whose name she does not want to mention- at the end of the eighties at the charity "Tegen Haar Wil" (Against Her Will), a shelter for sexually abused women in Ghent. Three weeks ago, Tania recounted that her friend had come for a visit. The TV was on. She saw that man from Brussels coming down the stairs of the courthouse in Neufchâteau. She suddenly cringed. Do you know him, I asked. She nodded. We then spent the night talking. She had told me many times about her childhood, about her pimp who loaned her out but never before in so much detail. She said she never knew the surnames of most of her perpetrators. To her, Nihoul was Mich. I can still hear her saying, Nihoul, really a suitable name for him.'

De Baets and Hupez remain nailed to their chairs the entire afternoon. Now and then, they look at each other, shocked. The story, retold by Tania, speaks of a substantial underground network of child prostitution, child murders, video cassette exchange, Nihoul's role as organiser of sex parties with children... 'Well, all of this is no good to us if we can't speak to your friend ourselves,' De Baets remarks. Tania gives him little hope. 'My friend left this network for good only last year. She has a family and is trying to build a new life. I never believed she would want to give all that up. She is terrified, by the way.'

When the BOB men get ready to leave, it is more or less transparent to Tania that she needs to do better. She has the distinct impression that these police officers don't believe a word of her story and are only here pro forma. Then she remembers that her friend wrote a manuscript in 1989 that she once took to the publisher Acco in (the Flemish city of) Leuven. She still has a copy, a bundle of photocopies with a coloured cover sheet. The manuscript, Tania warns, contains only a tiny, innocent part of the story. She hands a copy to De Baets. The latter leaves through the book and lets his eye rest

on the last page. There, it says, "Regina Louf, December 1989."

- You are making it very easy for us this way.
- My God, is her name in there? She'll kill me.
- Now that we know her name, you might as well call her.
- Perhaps that would be better, yes.

The two BOBs overhear the conversation between Tania and her now-named friend Regina; how Tania bends over backwards to assure her friend that the whole discussion was very productive, that these two gendarmes are in no way bullies and that she spent the entire afternoon talking to them. 'They are still here, by the way.' A long silence follows. Regina Louf clearly understands that she can forego her anonymity. Then Tania beckons De Baets: 'She wants to talk to you.' The voice sounds completely different from the one that will jolt public opinion a year and a half later. Silent, dejected. De Baets thinks the woman sees herself as a potential Neufchâteau suspect. 'I already regret asking Tania to contact you,' she sighed. De Baets tries to reassure her that she can testify anonymously; he can arrange that. 'Okay, just this once. But you have to promise to leave me alone after that.' Patriek De Baets and Regina Louf make an appointment for Sunday, September 15th. According to the most recent guidelines for incest victims, he will interrogate her in the "Serge Creuz" office of the Brussels BOB, an interrogation room equipped with four video cameras that allow victims, usually children, to tell their story only once.

Regina Louf is a no-show. On the day the interrogation was supposed to occur, De Baets receives a phone call from Bie Heyse, a therapist from Ghent, inquiring whether they have gone 'completely insane' over there at the gendarmerie. Heyse clarifies her patient suffers from a dissociative identity disorder. And yes, these are a consequence of severe sexual abuse during her youth. Her therapy has just started to bear fruit. 'If you are now going to make her revisit all those past events, I can't vouch for the consequences.' Too bad, thinks De Baets. In consultation with public prosecutor Bourlet, the team had already outlined a legal framework to allow her to be questioned as an anonymous witness. They had already allocated her a codename: X1. The Central Office for

Investigations (CBO) was already scrutinising her 1989 manuscript. Bourlet's team had already started to look into the 'pimp' Tony V, a name mentioned in her manuscript *6 De Baets is still trying to think of another way to find out more about this lady when his cell phone rings in the afternoon of 20 September: 'Hello, Regina Louf here. I've changed my mind. I had a long talk with my husband and my therapist. They agree.'

She later explained that she had sleepless nights following that initial brief telephone contact with De Baets. 'I considered: now they have my name, they will arrive at my doorstep quickly. So I thought taking the first step myself would be better.' Major Daniel Decraene of the CBO is in De Baets' office when an unexpected phone call comes in. They arrange an appointment for the same evening; the enthusiasm among the investigators is palpable. Without the cooperation of Regina Louf herself, an investigation would have started, nevertheless. One day earlier, on 19 September, Operation Bagou had officially been launched.*7 Philippe Hupez drafted the initial report: "Anonymous information. A salesman from Antwerp nicknamed Tony delivered children to paedophiles in the 1980s. He was mainly active in Antwerp, Flanders, and Brussels. The children were supplied by their own families. The adults had sexual relations with the children. Photographs and video recordings were made. Sometimes, they used violence. Photographs and videos were taken on the premises of a publicity company. The clients chose the locations themselves. The victims are afraid to talk because of the possible consequences for their parents. One accused in file 86/96 is alleged to have been a customer. We do not know who."*8

These last two sentences take a broad perspective of the truth. De Baets and Hupez know perfectly well that the information obtained from Tania V mainly relates to Michel Nihoul. However, the reason they conceal this has little to do with their distrust of the judicial police. It is legal cleverness with a double purpose. Nihoul has been arrested and has access to his files in Neufchâteau. By omitting his name in the initial report, De Baets and his team circumvent his finding out about her testimony. In the early days of their enquiry, they had no

idea yet what X1 had in store for them. If it turned out afterwards that she made up her entire story, this would be to the advantage of Dutroux and co, which is the reason why the main threads of the subsequent investigation strategy were specified in a confidential note to prosecutor Bourlet and only as an attachment to the official report. The result was a new super-secret file numbered 109/96. The last thing De Baets hears her say on the phone that day is something he will remember for a long time in the following months: 'I hope you realise what you are getting into.' De Baets chuckles; it's not the first time he's heard that line. 'Good,' Regina Louf concludes. 'At least you will never be able to deny it, I warned you. They won't let you have free reign over this.'

NOTES:

1. Cidep was the name of a commercial printing house run by de Bonvoisin via frontmen, where politicians of all persuasions could obtain free election prints and thus made themselves indebted to him, often without realising it. De Bonvoisin was given a severe prison sentence in this case but is now contesting it at the Mons Court of Appeal. This supplanted an earlier procedural battle in which the Court of Cassation overturned the Brussels Court of Appeals ruling. The trial must, therefore, be started from scratch.
2. The phone call would later be the subject of the 231/97 investigation by Brussels investigating judge Pignolet. He was informed that this was a plot to launch the X1 track and that Tania V intentionally called when De Baets was in Connerotte's office. A year and a half of intensive investigation provided no conclusive evidence on this version of the events.
3. Interrogation of Annie Bouty, Brussels judiciary police, 4 September 1996, PV 38.914 Z46.
4. Marnette tells Suys the incident by anecdote but refuses to put anything on paper 'against our bosses'. Suys then takes the initiative himself.
5. Interview with Tania V, June 21, 1998.
6. Regina Louf recovered most of the manuscript in her book "Zwijgen is voor daders" ("Remaining silent is for

perpetrators"; Houtekiet / Fontein), published at the end of 1998.

7. Bagou is the French word for 'smooth talk'.

8. Information, 19 September 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 112.360 (summary).

2. 'My God, don't ask me to come back'

Witness X1, 20 September 1996

- Let us start with your life in Knokke. Or, rather, please tell us your surname, first name, place, and date of birth. Then, we will discuss your childhood and where you were raised, and from there, we will address the significant periods in your life.
- For me, they are essential. My name is Regina Louf. I was born in the time of the flower power, the time of the first man on the moon. Born in Ghent on 29 January 1969, I

moved to Knokke with my grandmother when I was one and a half years old.

- What were your father and mother's names?
- That is a difficult subject... My father, my mother...'*1
- What about your maternal grandparents?
- I didn't know (my grandfather). He died in or around 1958. He was a police commissioner. My grandmother died in March 1996.
- How long did you live with your grandmother?
- Until I was ten and a half years old.
- Did you go to school during that period?
- Yes, of course. In the visitation school of the Sacred Heart.
- Is there anything from that period that you want to talk about?
- What do you want to know?*

The tone is set in those first few minutes of the first interrogation. Interrogators De Baets and Hupez do their utmost to stick to the rules and adopt a neutral, detached manner. Even though she already mentioned during a previous phone conversation, they are not allowed to ask her: were you sexually abused at the time? The interrogators were urged to keep the questions neutral. The information relevant to the investigation must come from her and no one else. X1 had a different understanding of the mode of questioning. When they ask her "if she can talk about that", she answers in the affirmative with a look suggesting: that is why I am here. If she senses that they want her to repeat anything she has already mentioned outside the interrogation context, she gapes at her interrogators, mystified. 'Actually, I was looking for a way to get it out of the way after one interrogation', X1 later recalls. 'I just wanted to tell them how the child prostitution network operates, what the internal codes are, how victims are made to remain silent for the rest of their lives. I couldn't imagine that they would be interested in my past.'

There is no mention of murders or sadistic sex games with children during the interrogation on September 20th. Topics that will lead her to wide-ranging reflections during subsequent interrogations, she now wavers with a 'no' or, at best, with: "I think I've unintentionally forgotten it." X1's first answers are often highly contradictory to later revelations. On the 20th of September, she states that she lost her virginity in

her mother's bed by her pimp, Tony, when she was twelve. During subsequent interrogations, she will speak of being pregnant at ten. And yet, the first interrogation already contains hints that the witness is presenting matters in a rosier light than she believes them to be. She is startled when De Baets asks her if her mother hasn't noticed a bloodstain on the mattress. 'Oh, I only bled a tiny bit.'

With a sense of detail, X1 describes how her grandmother in Knokke introduced her one day to a French-speaking pensioner who seemed to reside permanently in the fashionable seaside resort and was addressed by everyone as 'Monsieur'. He was one of her first customers. She was, she says, a year and a half old. Grandmother managed to blend the traits of a Spartan upbringing with those of a demanding pimp. 'I had to perform cleaning tasks too. One day, I had forgotten to polish some skirting boards. She didn't say anything about it. No, she ignored me. For three weeks, she didn't say a word. Until I threw myself before her and begged: tell me what I have done wrong! Then it came: you didn't polish those skirting boards. That's how she was. With her, it was all about being more perfect than perfect.' When it came down to allocating customers, Grandma was just as communicative. 'When I came home, there was a key to one of the nine rooms in the villa hanging on a hook'. Then, X1 essentially had to guess the customer's specific sexual requirement. If she did not sense and act precisely as expected from her, she received punishment. In this way, the "clients" helped determine her frame of reference for good and evil.

- When you spoke of 'Monsieur' just now, you said he showed up twice or thrice a week. Did the other customers visit as frequently?
- Yes, during the quiet periods. November, January, February. Then I had a nice vacation. I was content if I had one customer a day in those periods.
- If you had one a day, you were content?
- Yes, that was doable. Not that I liked it.
- But how many people came per day on average?
- Per day?
- How many people were...?
- Yes?
- Pfft... If all the rooms were occupied?

- Were they all of the same type of customers?
- No, not all of them, but still. Even if there were only two or three...
- Are we talking to two to three people a day here?
- Yeah, especially during the season.
- Didn't you have to go to school?
- Yes, I did.
- How did you combine that with your activities there?
- It wasn't difficult. I went to school, and at lunchtime, I came home to eat. In the evening, yes, at four o'clock. Classes were finished by four o'clock. (...)
- Did you never talk about that period with your mother?
- No.
- Not even now? Do you still visit your mother?
- I visit her now and then, yes. My mother is dying. She probably won't make it through the winter. What can I say to her? Goddamn it, I don't see the point.
- You're married; you've got kids. Do you take your children to visit your mother?
- I visit now and then, yes.
- And you never had any intimate contact with your mother? To talk about what happened at your grandmother's?
- No, no.
- Never?
- I've made attempts, I've made attempts, but...
- Attempts? With what purpose?
- Well, it attempts to explain what happened. And she immediately said that was impossible, that it wasn't true. Anyway, she then threatened to commit suicide, started taking medication and tearing her hair out... Then I thought: oh (...) I didn't want to have her death on my conscience as well.

Tony V worked as a representative for the German canine accessory brand Gimpet in 1980. In this capacity, he showed up at her mother's dog grooming salon in 1980 one day. X1 falls in love with the Antwerp macho. He is twenty-seven years older than she is. He sends the semi-feral child to the hairdresser, teaches her how to use makeup, and buys her red lingerie. He picks her up frequently during her last year in elementary school. For his use at first, then to lend her out.

- Were there other children?
- Yes, there were other children sometimes. Only sometimes, but there were some. However, I had little contact with them, except for Flo. I knew her.
- Were there other people present at those sex parties?
- It varied, but there were always at least six or seven people.

After about three hours, the BOBs notice the witness's temper shift.

The initially straightforward, confident answers are now drying up. She speaks at a slower pace, and she starts uttering enigmatic phrases lacking context or rationale: 'I felt guilty... Because I couldn't help that girl. I couldn't protect her. I tried everything. I tried to distract her.' De Baets broaches another subject—porn movies.

- How many times?
- So many times that, in the end, I lost count. So many times...
- And the actors were always the same? Was it always Pascal?
*3
- No, there were others. Sometimes, I was blindfolded, or they wore masks. Or something like that. That happened...
- What kind of masks?
- The kind you can buy in the store. In sex shops. Well, what's it called... SM stuff and the like. Pff. Those things are in leather. There were sometimes SM attributes, devices and stuff. Pff.
- But that was always filmed?
- That was filmed (...).
- Are you alright? Need more time?
- No, I'm not tired. But it's hard to find the right words (...).
- Have you recognised any customers recently?
- Yes, on television.
- Who?
- Nihoul. Just as I saw him for the first time on TV... I could not remember his name. Eventually, I started looking on Teletext. Like, wow, now I know his name. Yes, right away, immediately.

X1 remembers encountering Nihoul for the first time in 1982. She says he was one of those men who got excited when the

girl resisted, simulating a rape. Once, she says, Nihoul nearly suffocated her by pressing a pillow to her head. It becomes immediately apparent that X1 does not like picture confrontations. She dismissively gestures when the investigators lay a stack of car pictures before her. When she is confronted with the photo of the unshaven Nihoul posing as the cartoonish villain, reproduced by newspapers, magazines and television stations all over the world,*4 she nods no. She does not recognise him from that particular photo. We must still have pictures of Nihoul in a suit somewhere, with a tie,' says De Baets. 'I have a few photos of him at home,' adds X1 without hesitation.*5 It is not this observation, which later turns out to be hollow, which inspires the police to interrogate X1 a second time, but the following passage: she explains that Nihoul habitually took her to an apartment that she assumes was not his.

- Can you describe that apartment? Can you remember anything about it? Was it a single room, or was it an apartment? Or was it a house?
- Inside was a rather old-fashioned large door with an iron cast grille in front and a door with glass and an iron cast frame behind. One entered and then had to turn left. Then, an ascending staircase. Then, goh, how was it... then more stairs. And then, on the left side, there were some descending stairs. I recall antique objects. One entered a room with an adjacent inner courtyard but not a big one.
- Did you see any plants in the place?
- Yes, there were some. What else? I don't know...a tree, a pine tree, and some usual things like bushes, that was it.

The X1 affair starts with this dialogue. Nobody in the interrogation room realises that she provided a somewhat fragmented but more or less accurate description of the apartment that Annie Bouty called home in the early 1980s but in mirror image.*6 This is something that the interrogators notice going forward during their interviews with X1. In her descriptions, the left is often the right and vice versa. That early morning, the clock showing one thirty AM, De Baets is looking for a weak spot in the defensive wall of the witness. He decides to try some humour.

- Were there some recognisable clients in that period amongst the clientele?
- It's hard to say when they are undressed.
- Yes, I can imagine that one naked backside looks the same as the next one.
- Indeed, when you don't usually see their faces.
- Yes, I understand, but, err...
- I can't really say. Many individuals were very good at small talk, but I don't know whether they were important people.
- When you were a bit older, could you identify some people? Perhaps one who was talking of which you later realised I'd seen that face before?
- Yes, but it isn't a fun recollection... I tended to ban that picture from my memory banks immediately; it was so embarrassing. Sometimes, it was like, how the hell is that even possible? But half an hour later, I had forgotten about it. It was such a miserable experience, and it's very frustrating now. I want to provide you with proper answers.

The solution materialises after a short break. The videotapes show X1 shuffling uneasily on her chair, and her patience is wearing thin. 'My God, don't ask me to come back.' X1 has four kids and has to get up at 7 am every morning. De Baets recognises the barrier of guilt in X1, which he must breach with her during the next occasion.

- Alright, it's 2h45 am. Let's call it a night. We're going to sleep on it for a night or so.
- One night!?! (X1 exclaims)
- A week to sleep, then.
- Pff... behold the usual enthusiasm.
- Isn't that good?
- Sure.
- It's better to be enthusiastic than...
- Yes, of course, of course. How much time, I mean... the trouble I got myself into? How much time will this take?

The second hearing will take place a week later, on 30 September. So, a productive cadence is emerging.

- I saw her there.
- Where?
- Before that.

- In Ghent?
- At Nihoul's.
- In Brussels?
- Yes.
- In a club?
- In Brussels, yes. But that's all I know.
- Did you see her being abused?
- Not that I noticed.*7

By then, it is already half past one in the morning. De Baets and Hupez look at each other. The photo they have shown X1 is a childhood photo of Nathalie W, the first victim to come to Neufchâteau to testify about the existence of significant child prostitution networks in Belgium. Nathalie accused Michel Nihoul of raping her three times when she was a child. She said she had seen him a few times in the sex club Les Atrébates. X1 situates her in the period 1982-'83. X1 does not often quote correct dates; however, on this occasion, it appears she did. She never encountered Nathalie W on the premises of the BOB; therefore, she could not have seen her. And even if she had, it is highly doubtful that it would have helped. There are a few similarities between the Nathalie W of today and the more than fifteen-year-old photo X1 had already managed to convince her two interrogators earlier that day. After they pick her up in Ghent in the late afternoon, they detour via the Institute of the Sacred Heart before entering Brussels. From there, they drive into the centre of Jette. As they turn into an avenue lined by trees, X1 becomes restless in the back seat. In that part of the avenue, houses are on only one side. On the other side, there is a railroad. X1 remains tight-lipped and looks ostentatiously in the direction of the railroad. 'It was here,' she suddenly exclaims. The avenue they are driving through is Dupré Street.*8.

The second interrogation begins with an account of how a dog raped X1 when she was still a toddler. She explains that the first time that happened, her grandmother had prepared things poorly. She had neglected to tie up X1, and when her granddaughter started resisting and kicking around, the German shepherd bit X1 in the face. 'An accident,' she had to lie when back in school. She adds that scenes like this were filmed to order. After the dogs came the men. 'Apparently, the dog scenes sexually aroused these men.' There was a steady

clientele, claims X1. She also describes less macabre events, including in a hotel in Knokke. She mentions the names of four other children brought there by their parents, including Conny De Windt.*9

In the week before the second interrogation, X1 had called De Baets to tell him that she had deliberately withheld several things during the first hearing. She doubts whether to trust the two BOB officers, she says, and she also fears they would not believe her. 'Next time, I'll be more specific,' she promised. The first name X1 mentions that evening causes quite a commotion immediately. It is O, a well-known politician from where she grew up. He was one of the central figures at the sex parties in the hotel, she says.

- Do you remember the first names of other persons from the entourage of O who were present there? *10 Any surnames or first names of individuals you may have later recognised on television or elsewhere?
- Yes, there are some that I later ... It's bizarre. It's very odd that... there were occasionally people from the political world that I recognised later on television.
- Can you name these politicians?
- Oh, not at that time.
- Not then, but maybe now?
- Well okay. Those few times I have seen them on television, to say, um... I recognised N*11 and... I'm trying to think of his name but can't place him. He is very well known, however. He is still working at the side of E.*12.

Her interrogators insist and want to know if he, too, belonged to the (political party) CVP.

- Was it someone from the same entourage as O.?
- I believe it's rather mean to state that some of these individuals had been duped. In the sense that there were persons present who didn't know what they were getting into.
- And this person was one of them?
- That was one of them.
- So, he was...
- You could see straight away from their reactions. You could tell by the way they responded whether it was or wasn't part of their, let's say, habits. Their nervousness, their

discomfort, all of it. You could tell immediately if it was someone who...

The focus shifts to former top politician E, of whom X1 claims it certainly cannot be said that he had to be coerced to have sex with children. She says her grandmother sent her to the man's residence several times. She provides a reasonably detailed description. Gradually, the investigators understand that it is partly because these personalities reached a certain level of celebrity afterwards for those whose witnesses reveal any names. The investigators will never discover the identity of "the chiropractor, the doctor, the colonialist, the German and the Englishman." But they uncovered the identity of that one sportsman, who was quite well-known in the 1970s. In a horse riding school in Knokke, he was locked up in a small room with X1 by some friends. 'I knew what had to happen next, but he didn't'.

And all of this under the approving eye of an elderly grandmother? The BOB agents are getting increasingly intrigued by the motivations of the parents and grandparents. Her grandma certainly didn't do it out of voluntarism, says X1. The retired woman, who never held a job after her husband's death, led a luxurious life and enjoyed prestige in Knokke and beyond. She took a taxi to every place she went, bought products from expensive brands, and occasionally lent some financial support to a family member. Understanding this double life of X1 is a challenge to Inspector De Baets. While living in Knokke, she dutifully attended school and took ballet lessons. After she moved to Ghent, she maintained this double existence. She became pregnant when she was fifteen, and Tony V forced her to have an abortion. X1 claims her mother was keenly aware of what Tony was doing to her. She drove her daughter to nightclubs in Ghent, where SM parties occurred.

- Could your father be aware of the facts?
- My father is a particular case. If you asked him, he'd only deny everything. He never wanted to see it. And if my father thinks nothing happened, then nothing happened. Well, yes, it's fair to say...
- Is your father aware of what happened in the second period between twelve and sixteen?
- One day, Erwin told him.

- Who told him?
- Erwin, my husband. He said it once when he was furious. To which my father replied, in a few words: 'Well, do you still have that in your head?'
- So, in fact, that was a confession?
- That's how I interpreted it, yes...

Around midnight, X1 is starting to show signs of distress. De Baets confronts her with one photo after another. She recognises a picture of the notorious club Les Atrébates but admits that she recently saw the place featured on the TV news. The cause of her melancholy is 'Flo'. That was her friend back then. Flo was also frequently abused by Nihoul and the others, she says. The blond girl from Ghent, slightly older than X1, is mentioned at length in the manuscript Tania gave to the detectives. X1 avoids the subject.

A little before two AM, the interrogators asked her if she could provide more details about these SM parties. She gets up and removes a stack of papers from her handbag. She begins to read aloud from notes she made a few years back how they use all kinds of vibrators, bottles, the back of a whip, and something that she thought strongly resembled a mixer. 'I can't tell you this in any other way'. With evident surprise, her interrogators look at the amount of paper X1 kept in her bag. Entire stacks of sheets tapped on a typewriter, black Atoma notebooks. What she had just read out, she says, dates from August. The images of Dutroux and Nihoul brought back a lot of repressed memories. But the rest goes back to the period between 1989 and 1993.

- Were these writings meant for you?
- Um, no, It's to say I started with only some sentences actually,
- Yes?
- At the time, I was in the process of, well... healing from my dissociation and things like that.*13 But people who read it will be surprised by the names mentioned in it.

The interrogators are surprised when X1 hands over the entire package. It is improbable that she could have prepared this amount of writing in only a few days just for the sake of this interrogation. Written testimony is worth infinitely more than

spoken testimony in a judicial investigation. Everything that X1 will mention from now can be cross-referenced with how she handled her recollections in recent years. The timing of X1 making her writings available to the detectives follows shortly after Nathalie W's identification. Patrick De Baets seems to want to reward X1 in some way for her courage, can't get out of his words and then solemnly states: 'We want to inform you that we are also interrogating this girl. I believe she is a little older than you, thirty-one years.' X1 nods in silence before she removes a few more notebooks from her bag. 'Look here, September 1993.'

Analysing the entire consignment of writings will take investigators months of work. It takes until mid-January 1997 before they present their initial analyses. Only occasionally did X1 mention a date in her notes, but after examining the paper and the handwriting - or the typewriter's characters - they conclude with near certainty that her entire stack of writings predates the Dutroux case. X1 produced most of her papers during sleepless nights. Sometimes, her language is explicit but usually veiled. 'He [Tony] lent me out to his friends and business associates,' she writes on one of the non-dated sheets of A4 paper. 'The camera crews weren't just shooting commercials there (...) Those men being filmed there were wearing masks.*14

One of the favourite games during the sex parties she was forced to attend was to play hide and seek, the BOBs read. 'It was a matter of being found in a comfortable place, a sofa or something.' She mentions some first names and places that surfaced during the initial interrogations in the same writing.*15 At one point, she writes, Tony has planned to feature her in a publicity spot about tanning beds. She did not do it properly and received a beating.*16. In yet another paper, X1 mentions her grandmother, describing how she was sent to a customer who forced her to lick semen from the floor.*17. In a text dated 16 November 1994, she talks about her father, about how she once entered the living room and caught him masturbating in front of the television. The source of his arousal was a video recording in which she featured.*18. In a text written down on 20th March 1995, X1 refers to when she was eight and still living in Knokke. There were regularly four clients a day.*19 A bit further on in the stack of papers, the

investigators come across a text from 24 April 1995. X1 describes how Tony had taken her to a studio where she was blindfolded and tied to a bed. 'Someone came in with a dog which was going to be used to rape me,' she writes. 'I noticed the hum of the cameras.'*20

In a more extensive text, twelve pages long but not dated, she describes how she becomes pregnant at one point and how Tony decides that the child should be killed.*21 'I wonder if Tony is still going everywhere bragging about his good contacts with...' reveals some writing dated May 1995. It mentions a baron and a politician. In this three-sheet letter, she expresses her joy that she has not heard of Tony for some time but doubts whether she will ever be healed. Her life, she writes, is a constant struggle with recollections, but: 'Now I am free, I am young while they are old.'*22 'I want to forget the past,' she says on the following five pages. I want to forget them, those SM parties, those animals, those belts, those whips, those chains, those knives.'*23

In a text dating from early 1996, X1 resolves never to watch TV news again: 'I saw someone there that I was made to forget.'*24 'I'd like to go to the police, but I don't know how,' she writes. 'I don't want to involve mom and dad.' She writes that she feels guilty and that reporting any of her past to the police might result in her children being removed from her. 'Tania doesn't understand me,' she concludes. 'She doesn't understand that I had to introduce and train girls myself.'*25

She turns to her therapist in a separate notebook, apparently intended as a diary. She describes how she tries to keep specific repressed memories out of the therapy and how she often thinks back to Allan, the Canadian salesman she takes for her biological father. 'I often see my perpetrators on television,' she says. 'Then those details come back to me. Their clothes, their aftershave.' She hates men in tailored suits, neighbourhoods with villas, expensive furniture, and expensive cars... 'I never want to be afraid again.'*26

In mid-October, X1 reported in a phone call to De Baets that she had managed to identify yet another perpetrator. It concerns the Brussels lawyer E., a Flemish weekly recently printed a photograph. The public prosecutor in Neufchâteau already possessed some clear indications that the man in question was a very close friend of Michel Nihoul.*27

The October 1996 events left the gendarmerie leadership and the national magistracy no choice but to start the so-called "side dossier". First, there was unrest among the general public after the dismissal of the investigating judge, Jean-Marc Connerotte, over a plate of spaghetti. One week later, more than 300,000 Belgians joined the white march. Plenty of banners and placards during this march mention "names" and "lists" (suggesting high-level perpetrators). During that period, protection (for the high and mighty) was no longer a certainty. 13 October is the day of the fearful countdown. Several politicians conveyed suggestions that needed to be more subtle to Attorney General Eliane Liekendael of the Court of Cassation. They ask her to demonstrate 'creativity' in her assessment of the complaints filed by the lawyers of Dutroux and Nihoul about judicial and investigative bias in Connerotte's earlier investigation. But the mere thought of "pliable justice" advocated by those politicians irritates the conservative magistracy. Several municipal councils joined the general resistance against the seemingly inevitable "spaghetti judgment" of the dismissal of Connerotte and organised petition actions. It seems inevitable that the entire Dutroux investigation will be removed from Neufchâteau.

It was Connerotte himself who, on Monday 14th October, faced the TV cameras at ill-ease, begging them to respect the judgment of the Court of Cassation, whatever the judgment will be. 'If the case is withdrawn from my oversight, you may rest assured that the enquiry will be carried out with the same unwavering zeal and that the investigation will continue. Let us remain reasonable.' In the afternoon, Nabela Benaïssa (sister of the kidnap and murder victim Loubna Benaïssa) managed to prevent a popular uprising on the steps of the Brussels courthouse with a megaphone. In many places in Belgium, workers started spontaneous strike actions.

On the weekend preceding that tumultuous Monday, X1 reported to the Brussels BOB premises for the third time. On Saturday, 12th October, accompanied by BOB officers Rudy Hoskens and Stephan Liesenborgs, she drove to Knokke to scout and point out addresses of interest which she does convincingly. In front of the villa of E, she seems to suffer from a sudden panic attack. Her description of the house's interior and the various access points confirm the BOB's impression

that she has indeed been here before. She also points out Sunny Corner, her grandmother's former villa, and some hotels and villas she was sent to as a child.*28

The third interrogation of X1, which commenced at noon on Sunday and finished at ten o'clock in the evening, becomes an emotional breakthrough for De Baets and Hupez. X1 started her story with her experiences with lawyer E in a Brussels-based house with an SM basement. There were other girls there, she says. Clo was there, too. Flo, Clo... Was this the same person? Affirmative. "Flo" was the pseudonym in her manuscript, while "Clo" was the actual call sign of her friend within the network, says X1. Lawyer E has bizarre SM preferences.

- He liked having his ballsack stitched with needle and thread, too.
- So, just to be clear: you're talking about sewing the scrotum with needle and thread, are you?
- Yeah.
- Did you have to do that a lot?
- Yes, I did.
- What was the result?
- The result?
- Yes, after your sewing activities. What happened then?
- He certainly enjoyed it... And then it was over, yes.*29

Shortly after that follows a description of how children received cuts on the abdomen and between the legs with knives. Nihoul and E got excited by such activities, X1 recounts. Some girls went crazy afterwards, and I never saw them again. X1 was made from sterner stuff than many others and ended up, in her own words, 'in the extreme branch of the SM world'. And as her pain threshold evolved, so did the wishes of her clients.

- Did worse things happen in your presence, worse than the facts you listed so far?
- (after a long silence) I wonder if I'm allowed to speak.
- Excuse me?
- I don't know if I'm allowed to talk.
- Have you written about it?
- No.
- Were there worse things?

- Yes, there were.
- With you or other girls?
- Pff... pff... My baby was almost born on time.
- And you're sure?
- I think I was thirty-eight weeks pregnant.
- At some point, you were pregnant? How old were you then?
- Fourteen.
- You stated earlier that Tony hit you back then.
- I was in labour. He wasn't dead. He was born alive.
- How many weeks did you carry him?
- Thirty-eight weeks. A normal pregnancy lasts forty weeks.
- So, the pregnancy was almost complete?
- Yes.
- Where did it happen?
- (silence) I am trying to remember.
- Were you at home? Or didn't Tony spank you then?
- Yes, he did.
- Where?
- At my place.
- And the baby, when was it born?
- I don't remember that; I don't recall.
- What happened to the baby? Was it a boy or a girl?
- It was a boy, but I'm not sure. I never got to hold him in my arms.

No matter what De Baets and Hupez try, they can't get a word out of her for about ten minutes. X1 is frantically scratching her feet, hiding her head in her arms. She nods no all the time, occasionally yes. She stays quiet on her side of the table most of the time. Around ten in the evening, X1 tells us that she had contractions at her parents' house in Ghent. She called Tony. He came to pick her up and drove her straight away to Knokke, to her grandmother's place. More than fifteen hours went by between the first contraction and childbirth.

- Tony was there, and your grandmother was there. Were there any other people present?
- (long silence) Not yet at that time.
- Not at that time. Later on? Did people come? Did anyone come? Please speak! Let it out! Say it. Say what happened!

X1 stares blankly with tearful eyes and remains unmoved at De Baets' outburst. He calms down and strikes a gentle tone but waits about twenty minutes for the first nod.

- You don't want to remember, do you?
- (silence)
- This is the worst thing you've been through, is it not?
- (nods yes)
- And why don't you want to talk about it? Help yourself! You can talk about it.
- I want to stay alive tomorrow.
- Yes, that's precisely why you need to keep talking. Have you talked to other people about this before, or is it...
- (shakes head)
- With no one. And isn't that too heavy a burden to carry on your own? Doesn't it sit on your stomach? Do you need to talk about it?
- It's so difficult (...).
- We already suspect the outcome of what you'll say, don't we? But we must learn the exact circumstances, who was there, and what happened.

The BOB officers find out that, according to X1, eight people were present at the childbirth, including Michel Nihoul and E. Hupez discovers that awkward questions break her out of her silence when he asks her who had fathered the child. 'How could I possibly know!' So, did no one in her circle notice anything about the pregnancy? 'Only after six months did one start to notice, not before. I never really had a... Well, in the end, I weighed fifty-two kilos, so.' In the last months of pregnancy, she was 'in particular demand on the circuit', she says. She mentions two other people who drove head over heels to the Sunny Corner in Knokke that night on the 16th of June 1983: ex-politician E. and 'some baron'. De Baets has to restrain himself when he hears X1 testify that Tony V was the party responsible for the practical organisation of this distasteful event but "did not participate himself".

- Hang on a minute... He must have contact with those people. He's not going to drive you around haphazardly, is he? It can't be that he just drove off with you somewhere

and thought, 'Well, we'll ring the doorbell to see if they don't need you here.

- Suppose not, but I wonder if...Well, yes, he knows these people, of course.
- And those same people were there at the time you gave birth?
- Those hardcore types, yes.

This audience included a doctor, claims X1. This comment evokes a thought from Hupez. It can't be that they didn't notice anything during the medical examinations at your school. 'A doctor always gave me a note. That's why I didn't have to be examined at school.'

- Did anything happen after the delivery?
- After Tony left, I got up. I put on a T-shirt and went to the living room to ask where the baby was and if I could see him. They then started teasing me. 'If you blow me, I'll tell you what it is, and you can hold it.' That sort of thing. Games. (silence) I think he was in the kitchen. When they occupied me, I heard him crying (...).
- Who was bullying you?
- Pff, everyone.
- Did you have to satisfy them there in the living room? Did you? And how?
- Orally.
- All of them?
- Tony...
- Were they drunk, then?
- They had a bit to drink, yes. Those men drink all the time.

After a car ride of about 2 hours, she is blindfolded and arrives at a place where a group of people are again waiting for her. She is undressed. Only the blindfold remains. Tony takes her hand and rests it on something.

- On what?
- (long silence) I feel my baby, his hair, nose ... I was almost glad ... uh, reassured because...
- You were happy because you could feel your child?
- (nods yes, rests her head on the table) I cannot say it.

The detectives wisely decided to abide their time and not force her anymore. X1 looks up occasionally, trying to pull herself together.

- He asked me... (sobbing) he asked me... he asked me who should die. Me... or the baby (begins to weep again).
- He asked you who should die, you or the baby?
- (sobbing) I said, please, let me die, please let me die, please!
- You begged him to die, is that it?
- Yes, he said. Yes, you made the wrong choice.

NOTES:

1. As a condition of cooperating with the investigation, X1 made the BOB officers promise to leave her parents alone.
2. Interrogation X1, 20 September 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 114.035. The authors used the French translation of this interrogation, which was transcribed based on the video recordings. Kirsten Van Grimbergen translated the interrogation on 6 November 1996, PV 116.600. As will be shown further, the French versions contained minor translation errors here and there. Also, the authors made some minor changes to promote readability.
3. X1 mentioned this name earlier during the interrogation.
4. Michel Nihoul's lawyers will later loudly protest that the Neufchâteau prosecutor's office allowed a photograph of their client to be distributed.
5. She will regretfully announce that she destroyed all photos of Nihoul and Tony some time ago.
6. In mid-October, a detective visits the house in question. After a conversation with the current occupant, he decided there were striking similarities between the description of X1 and its condition when he moved in. BOB Brussels, 13 October 1996, PV 115.458.
7. Interrogation X1, 29 September 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 114.037. Translated by Kirsten Van Grimbergen, 6 November 1996, PV 116.600. Translated from French into Dutch by the authors.
8. September 29th, Brussels PDB, PV 114.038.
9. Pseudonym.

10. Mentions
the name of the politician.
11. Names a
former top politician.
12. Mentions
the name of a former top politician.
13. During
her contact with the BOB, X1 does not hide the fact that
she is undergoing therapy because she suffers from
dissociative disorders.
14. Analysis
notebook B1, X1, 22 January 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.157.
15. Analysis
notes B3, X1, 22 January 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.159.
16. Analysis
notes B4, X1, 24 January 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.160.
17. Analysis
script B5, X1, 23 January 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.161.
18. Analysis
notes B6, X1, 23 -January 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.162.
19. Analysis
note B7, X1, January 23, 1997, BOB Brussels, PV 150.163.
20. Analysis
note B9, X1, 28 January 1997, BOB Brussels, PV 150.165.
21. Analysis
notes E1, X1, 12 February 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.276.
22. Analysis
notebook E11, X1, 12 February 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.328.
23. Analysis
notebook E13, X1, 12 February 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.330.
24. Analysis
notebook E14, X1, 12 February 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.331.

25. Analysis
notebook E16, X1, 12 February 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
150.333.
26. Analysis
notebook F20, X1, 29 March 1997, BOB Brussels, PV
151.010.
27. BOB
Brussels, 15 November 1996, PV 117.146.
28. BOB
Brussels, 12 October 1996, PV 115.334
29. Interrogat
ion X1, 13 October 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 114.039.
Translated by Kirsten Van Grimbergen, 19 November
1996, PV 117.153. Translated back from French into
Dutch by the authors.

3. Can I stop looking at pictures, please?

Witness X1, 25 October 1996.

Halfway through the third interrogation, after yet another long silence, X1 let slip that sometimes she still hears him in her mind. Occasionally, she runs up the stairs, obeying a stronger impulse than the certainty of an absent baby. De Baets and Hupez did not wish to interrupt her monologue. But it had not escaped their notice that she also said: 'When I hear my Clo now, I sometimes have doubts.' Just before driving into Ghent, she pushed forward a little from the back seat. 'Clo is dead,'

she said, in the tone of a surgeon after a botched operation. The Clo - aka Flo - she had talked about extensively was dead. She had initially kept that quiet, she explained, because she wanted to cherish her memories. 'In fact, I knew very little about her.' De Baets turned around: 'Did you know where she went to school?' X1 replied that she had accompanied her once to her school. 'That was in Wispelberg Street.'

A few days later, first sergeant Stephan Liesenborghs had an appointment with a secretary who had many years of service at the municipal atheneum on Wispelberg Street in Ghent. The woman, greatly moved by the events of the past few months, is eager to reciprocate when asked to assist the public prosecutor in Neufchâteau. 'Some strange things have happened here during that time,' she sighs. She happily obliges to dive into her archives. Liesenborghs returns to Brussels with a ring binder full of student forms from the early eighties. He staples a passport photograph to each record. The lady secretary gave him this folder because of one specific case. 'We never given any details about this case afterwards,' she adds.

As will be understood later, the big problem with the X1 investigation is that the detectives were initially utterly unaware of the controversy this affair would spark. De Baets had yet to deem it necessary to draw up an official report of X1's comments during her car journey with the officers. As a result, it may forever remain debatable whether it was not he who led X1 -perhaps unconsciously- to give a name and a face to Clo. However, this perspective is not evident from the result of First Sergeant Liesenborghs' search. He returns from Ghent with a folder containing only information about those girls whose surnames are alphabetically arranged between DR and DU. Carine Dellaert does not belong on that list. 'I have been trying to explain this point for two years now,' says De Baets later. 'We had no idea at the time who Clo might be.'

What X1 wrote in her manuscript "Levenslang" (Lifelong) could be verified. It is striking that already then, at twenty years of age, X1 was able to sketch an oppressively realistic picture of the realities of child prostitution. Fearful as she was, she called Tony in her manuscript 'Karel' and herself 'Gina' or

'Reggie'. The character Flo is omnipresent. X1 characterises her as her mentor, big sister, and only confidante. It appears that she created the portrait of Flo years before these interrogations:

"I celebrated my thirteenth birthday with Flo. She bought me sexy underwear and a plush bear (which emphasised the contradiction of our lifestyles!) I thanked her, and then we drank wine at a park. We huddled close together; it was cold, and we exhaled little white clouds(...).

'I was quite an easy victim for Karel, but I use him too, you see? He buys me clothes I could never afford otherwise. And all I have to do is get a guy for a while. Easy, right?'

I admired her perspective on the matter.

`I'm going to work for myself later. As soon as I'm eighteen, I'm going to get emancipated and become an escort girl. Do you know that? I admitted I did not, which made her burst into laughter.

`Reggie, what a blockhead you are. Escort girl, prostitute, hooker. It all comes down to the same thing!'

'What do you mean, Flo, are we whores?'

'Yes, what were you thinking, stupid? Of course, we're whores (...).

'Flo, what a rotten birthday!'

She handed me a cup and smiled.

'Reggie, don't ponder on it so! He really does love you. He has to have an income, doesn't he? And what does it matter anyway? It's an easy job, isn't it?' That night, I allowed myself to get drunk slowly, and we forgot our sorrows in each other's arms. There was nothing romantic about it. We were just two girls trying to tell each other that our predicament wasn't so dire and we would get out of this situation one day.*1

Whoever reads the old manuscript with hindsight will be struck by the children's novel style with which Regina Louf describes her wonder years. There is never a shortage of references to 'much worse things' in the manuscript, but nobody ever dies, not even Flo. In any case, Flo continues to live on in her "Levenslang" manuscript until November 1984, when Regina Louf gets to know her current husband, Erwin Beeckman, during a horse ride baptism. The girl, later identified by the investigators as Clo, disappeared in 1982 and was undoubtedly murdered before November 1984. X1 is not

surprised when the interrogators confront her with the contradiction, as appears from one of the faxes she later sends to De Baets: 'If it bothers you: yes, my time with Clo is not in my book. I knew that then, and there are several reasons for this. My main aim was emotional: I was not yet ready to admit that Clo was no longer there. I wanted to keep her alive in my mind and with her the other children, including my children. So, I didn't let her die in my book but spread my experiences with her across the years I described in that section.*2

There is little coherence to be found in her notes. In the plastic bag full of loose writings and unfinished diaries she handed over during the second interrogation, there is another mention of Flo. X1 describes how her friend gave birth to a child in mid-1983. This at least allows us to conclude that this part of her account was not 'constructed' during the interrogations, as some later claim.

The main subject of the fourth interrogation on the evening of October 25th needs to be clarified at the onset. Clo. X1 starts reasonably docile with a story of the arrival of Tony, who had come to pick her up at home in Ghent. She was blindfolded and had to lie down in the back seat of his car. 'So I knew something was going to happen.' The blindfold only came off when they arrived at 'that house'. X1 describes what looks like your average house: 'A hallway, a fairly large living room, a kind of American kitchen.' Lawyer E. was there, politician O., Tony himself and two men whose names X1 doesn't know.

- And is Clo there?
- Yes
- What do you see? What do you see at that moment?
- That she's in trouble.
- What kind of trouble?
- (first silence) Pff, she's having horrible contractions, but, uh, she's in utter panic. They're not helping her. She's, uh, well...
- Clo is suffering from contractions?
- Clo is having contractions.
- Was Clo pregnant?
- Yes. *3

X1 relates how she tried to calm Clo with little success. Clo was lying on a bed and wore nothing but a T-shirt with a fluorescent print. X1 helped her breathe rhythmically for about half an hour. Clo was in a terrible state. Blood is normal with childbirth, X1 stated, but her bleeding was excessive. She tried to get the attention of the others. 'I said something like: we must take her to the hospital, or a doctor must come. Tony came over to me, grabbed me and threw me in the room. He had become irate. I was the only one with her and had to keep her quiet.' X1 guesses that she spent several hours by Clo's side. From X1's account, it is possible to conclude that this was not a situation of perversity. One of the girls had become pregnant, and there were complications.

- And then her baby... her baby was born. I put it on her belly, but she didn't seem to ... pff... Then, I let it lie on her stomach for a while. I then had a hard time holding the baby so it didn't slip, and I took a knife to cut the umbilical cord. I started shouting at the little one because, pff, well,
- Was the baby alive?
- When I looked after him, he was alive, yes.
- Was it a boy or a girl?
- It was a boy.
- Did you hear the baby cry?
- The moment he was born?
- Yes, did you?
- He didn't really cry. No, but...
- Did you hear him cry after that?
- No, I didn't pay any more attention (silence).
- What happened after that?
- After a while, Tony came to get me. I had to go with him. I didn't want to. I wanted to stay with Clo.
- When Tony comes to get you, is Clo alive?
- I don't know; I don't think so.

-

The men didn't verbally confirm it, but X1 was sure that her friend had died. For the others, this seemingly did not dampen the ambience. Satisfied that this situation was resolved, the whole group drove to Bruges, a Chinese restaurant. Tony did not tag along, says X1, indicating that he might have had to take care of the remains of Clo and the baby. When they got to

the coffee, two other men joined them. One is a particular 'Guy', a French speaker; the other X1 later identifies as a policeman she knew from her grandmother's house in Knokke. At the end of the dinner, late in the evening, O. suggested that we all go there. It was not so far away. 'Let's drop by Cécile's,' X1 heard him say. Once there, she was forced to have intercourse with each of the men. The interrogators, however, want to delve further into Clo's fate.

- Have you been to that house before?
- Yes, but always at night. Yes, I didn't know if the house was quite big as it was dark.'
- Was it a white house, red? Can you recall any details about the place?
- What did I remember? As one went up to the house... on the right side, there was a landscaped pond, but, uh... different from a natural pond. It was rectangular. And some bricks were lying around, I noticed. All the rest...
- Bricks?
- Yes, a square thing like that, like brickwork with a fountain.
- At the pond?
- Yes, but I can't call it a pond. It was something similar to that—what do you call it? And there was water in it.
- Was there a fence around the house, a small wall, or...
- Err, there is a little wall about this high (points to about a meter). It was in an angle, slanted and err.... and a fence (...). And err, the... yeah, the path was laid with stones: some natural stone or something. I can't say what kind exactly.

Recalling and describing stone or concrete structures is no problem for X1, which contrasts starkly with her reaction whenever she is asked to look at photographs of faces, as became apparent when De Baets presented the result of First Sergeant Liesenborg's research. In front of her lay eight enlarged photocopies of passport photographs, supplemented by two more or less identical photocopies of the pictures of Carine Dellaert. The investigators added these pictures just before the 3rd X1 interrogation after they stumbled in their archives on an unsolved murder of a girl in Ghent during the early 1980s. The two photos show Carine Dellaert in different guises. In one photo, she looks like a chubby secretary with glasses and curly hair. The other photo is the one that

appeared in the press at the time and in which she seems more like a shy hippie. On 25 October 1996, the investigators know little more about her than what a few old press cuttings can offer regarding information. The ten photographs are collated into a kind of album.

- And are you going to tell us who you recognise?
- Pff, I'll do what I can (the pictures are in front of her). And who should I know of these people?
- Well, I don't know. So you don't recognise anyone?
- (nods no, silence)
- You really don't remember anyone?
- (nods no) What's going on?
- I don't know. I'm just asking you if you recognise anyone.
- (nods no)
- Could you look a second time? Do you see any faces that you remember?
- Yes, but I hate pictures.
- Do you hate pictures?
- I can't stand them. I'm sorry. You know... I can't bear them.
- Who do you recognise?
- I don't want to anymore. (long silence) Now, I'm going to go against you... No, I can't, I'm sorry.

X1 only glanced at the album briefly but did not grant it a second look. During the subsequent battle of wills, De Baets loses his composure before she does.

- You have to tell us!
- What?!
- You have to tell us who you recognise.
- No!
- There are numbers. Please give us the numbers then.
- No, I don't want to.
- Someone who has also suffered...
- Yes, I'm sorry, but I can't do it.
- Yes, you must.
- I don't want to!
- What is stopping you?
- I'm going through a difficult time, you know. (...).
- How many people do you recognise in these pictures?
- I don't know (silence). Do you really want to know?

- Yes, I do.
- Is there no way to avoid it? I know that Clo is among them.
- Can you point her out?
- No, I can't.
- Can you show her?
- No, I will not.
- What prevents you from doing it?
- (silence)

It becomes a dialogue of hours. 'Give me ten years or so,' X1 objects. 'We don't have that much time,' Hupez says. A resentful X1 mimics Hupez's voice. 'We don't have time... Neither do I. I don't have time. I don't have time to do it. I don't want to (...).'

- How many pictures of Clo did you see in that package?
- (silence, looks at the pictures). I'm not a lunatic, but I could still become one. I can't; I can't because...
- Because?
- Because I feel guilty (...). If I say it... if I say it, then I will be forced to feel it.
- What do you say if I said it...
- Well, I don't want to feel it. I just... I wanted to know so badly. I loved her so much, Flo... (silence). Flo won't cease to exist in my mind because of it; Flo will begin to exist again because of that, and it is precisely this which scares me.
- Why?
- If I point her out to you, she will begin to exist again for me.
- You don't have to forget Clo, do you?
- No.
- Clo must continue to exist inside of you? She was still your friend, right? You always remembered her.
- That is just it... I did forget about her. You know, I didn't even know what she looked like anymore. I really don't.
- And now you remember?
- I know I have to point her out to you. I know I have to do it (...).
- You helped her with all you could.
- If I help her now, I won't be able to sleep today. And tomorrow, and the day after that, well... yes...
- Hm...
- Maybe not, maybe yes. I know I'm being obstinate.

- Yes.
- (Turns the pictures over until one of them is on top.)
- Is that Clo?
- I'm not stubborn enough. I hope that... ah, why do I always give in when I don't want to?

Grumbling and while objecting, X1 opened the photo book on page 7. There, under the code X1-P7, is a photo of Carine Dellaert. If De Baets, Hupez, and all the others present feel the adrenaline pumping in their veins at that moment, there will be a lot of criticism later about X1's photo recognition. When the eight photos from the school archives were copied and enlarged to A4 format, the staples which attached the images to the sheets remained visible. The staples are not visible only on photos P4 and P7 (both of Carine Dellaert) because these photos are not part of the school archives. Although he had nothing to do with making the photocopies, De Baets will later be suspected of having used the staples as a secret tool.*4 If this is how it happened, one wonders why the interrogators did not simply whisper the correct number of the photograph to her. The staple hypothesis becomes even more tenuous when it turns out that X1 also pulled out photo P4 that same evening, in which Carine Dellaert looks utterly different than photo P7.*5

The photo confrontation does not end after she points out P7. De Baets immediately asks X1 if she recognises any other photos. X1 seems to struggle again and refuses, then allows herself to be persuaded, takes some sheets from the album, and slides them toward her interrogators. Photo P4 is among them, but next to it are three other photos. X1 has an angry grimace as she slides the result towards the interrogators.

- Can I stop looking at pictures, please?
- Do you know these girls?
- (nods yes)
- It's not worth it anymore. I don't want them anymore. I'm tired of it (puts her head on the table)...
- Hm?
- Do you know those girls? (points to the pictures X1 gave him)
- Why do you want to know categorically?
- Because you selected these pictures.

- And therefore I am obliged to answer you?!

A break in the interrogation is scheduled between one and two o'clock am. The interrogators have put aside the first picture of Carine Dellaert, and X1 has now made a stack of four photos: P1, P2, P4 and P8. The second photo of Carine Dellaert is now also in this stack. Still, it may seem odd that three of the eight haphazardly chosen former students of a Flemish high school would all depict victims of child prostitution. Yet this is not necessarily so. During their meeting, The school secretary pointed out one of the three remaining girls to First Sergeant Liesenborghs. Later in his investigation, he interviewed a witness near the Sint-Pieters Square in Ghent. The latter revealed to him that it was a public secret at the time that a group of teenage girls from the atheneum prostituted themselves and had themselves picked up from a youth café called Barbarella for 'jobs' in upmarket villas on the outskirts of Ghent. This testimony corroborates a story X1 can tell about photo P1. She relates the picture of this person to SM evenings in the mansion of a businessman in Destelbergen.

- Do you think Clo recruited those girls to go there?
- That wouldn't surprise me.
- Clo was older than you?
- (nods yes)

Carine Dellaert was indeed three years older than X1, as she incidentally pointed out in her manuscript. X1 is less accurate when they discuss the girl in photo P1. X1 seems to mistake her for someone else. She is talking about a certain 'Marleen', a girl whose address X1 visited two weeks earlier. Her face resembles the one on the somewhat blurry P1 photo, but this is someone else altogether. It seems like X1 is convinced that all the photos presented to her denominate victims of sexual abuse, and her task is to identify as many as possible.

The school secretary had a specific intention when she handed Liesenborgs the folder with the name abbreviations DR-DU because of that one girl who had died. P8 shows the face of Véronique D., the daughter of a businessman from Ghent. She died in September 1983. X1's reaction to this photograph startled De Baets and Hupez.

- May I show you picture P8?
- I was already expecting it. I already asked myself when he would show that one.
- Do you want to go on now? Do you want to talk about the photo? Do you want to talk about this girl? Do you want to talk about what you know about her?
- They killed her.
- They killed her, okay. Can you... I don't know; provide some context to explain where you knew this girl and your relationship with her. Did you know her name?
- No, but she went there regularly.
- Where?
- Pff, at those parties.
- Do you know who brought her?
- No.
- Would you know where she came from, this girl? Did you talk to her?
- I wasn't interested, no...
- You never spoke to her?
- No, I didn't talk to anyone. No, not even with Clo.
- Was she a friend of someone?
- I suppose Clo knew her, yes.
- Were you present when she was murdered?
- Yes.
- Can you talk about that? Can you tell us who was there when she was killed?
- Oh, my God.
- Who did it?
- Who did it... I don't know.
- Can you explain the circumstances... of what they did to her?
- (looks at the table) She was not allowed to stop crying or resisting.
- Do you see the people who were there?
- (nods yes)
- Do you see where it is?
- (nods no)

Many more nods pass before X1 begins her gruesome story. She had to hold the girl, she says, in such a way that it hurt so much that she might not feel the other pain, the pain of a razor blade being pushed into her vagina. She says the man who got

particularly excited about this was Nihoul. Annie Bouty handed him the razor blade.

- I have enough nightmares to fill a lifetime, pff.... (cynical) I even have a choice. Which nightmare shall I revisit tonight?
- Which individuals were also present, as far as you can remember?
- Van de W .*6 Tony, eh...
- The older Van de W?
- And his... his eldest son. And that lawyer.
- Is it the same one you mentioned before?
- Yeah.

Clo is also present that evening, X1 continues, in the company of an adult woman. X1 has a harder time describing the faith of the girl P8 that evening. She was, she says, forced to wound her even more in the vagina with a knife. X1 cannot continue after that, staring at the ground in tears.

- Speak up! Let it come out! Chase it out of your mind!
- No.
- Why not?
- Because I never want to, never lose control. That's the reason.
- You don't lose control. They made you lose control. (...) Can you tell us anything today? Where were those other girls?
- (nods yes, but again looks at the ground silently)

It all took place in Ghent, in a house 'near Clo's', she says a little later. She sobs and tells how they taunted her with knife jabs and how they forced her to kill the girl. A long silence later, De Baets and Hupez ask their last questions.

- How old were you then?
- I don't know. Not yet fourteen, I think.
- That was in '83?
- I don't know.
- If you weren't fourteen yet, it must have been in '83...
- I don't know. I don't know.
- Do you know what they did to that girl?
- No, I don't know.
- You never asked?
- No, no.
- Did you know her name was Véronique?
- No.

The interrogation ended a little after five in the morning and a few hours later led to a flurry of activity at the BOB in Brussels. The girl in photo P1 was identified as Sandra D., born in 1972.*7 The woman, now 25 years old, initially refused the BOB officers to interrogate her but was eventually talked into it, and she made a relaxed impression. None of the names cited for her mean anything to her. She explains that her parents did not allow her to go out before she was sixteen.*8 This will not prevent X1 from continuing to insist in the faxes she sent and subsequent interrogations that this was about Marleen, 'who was also in the network'. Another photograph X1 added to the stack of pictures is Els D*9, who had since fled to the Netherlands and would never be interrogated as part of the X1 enquiry.

First sergeant Aimé Bille found out more about Véronique D. She appears to have died on 4 September 1983, a mere 17 years old. X1 was fourteen at the time and thus gave a nearly correct date. What Bille learns about the cause of Véronique D.'s death is less consistent. The girl appeared to have succumbed to a long and lingering illness, and she hardly attended school during the last months of her life. Bille promptly submitted a request to examining magistrate Langlois for a warrant authorising the exhumation of the girl's remains.*10 From far away Neufchâteau, Langlois obviously could not comply. The request was deemed less urgent, and approvals from the public prosecutor in Ghent are pending. In any case, Bille notes something strange is afoot with Véronique D's death certificate, drawn up by two East-Flanders doctors. One is a neurosurgeon, the other a neurologist. If it is true that Véronique D. officially died of cancer, it is strange that two doctors with such a speciality would have provided palliative care in her last hours.

In the hectic atmosphere of ongoing Dutroux unrest, De Baets and Hupez address X1 during the fifth interrogation, which begins a little after midnight on October 31.

- Our initial enquiry shows that Véronique died naturally, contrary to your statement. We have reason to believe that you have told the truth, but we have recovered a C3 form signed by two doctors, De Penner and De Vlaeminck.*11 Do you know either of these two names, or have you heard of them?

- I know both of them, but I know De Penner for sure.
- Can you tell us who De Penner is or remember him?
- I heard that name several times, and I know I ended up in his bed. But from there, recall any details about him... and how she...err, well, yes. That isn't easy because I thought Tony didn't have a role.
- Do you mean to say he wasn't Tony's acquaintance?
- No. *12

With this interrogation technique, X1 might well be considered capable of accusing the entire male portion of the world's population of paedophilia. The investigators could also have waited until they got their hands on photos of the two doctors, mixed them in with some other pictures, and verified whether she could point out the right individuals. The interrogators can now only listen to X1 connect them to the sex parties in the businessman's villa from Destelbergen. Due to the interrogator's rather energetic way of questioning, it was easy for the Ghent public prosecutor's office later in early 1997 to dismiss any further arguments to delve deeper into the dossier of Véronique D. and let her mortal remains rest in peace. Yet there are good reasons not to disregard the testimony of X1 about Véronique D.

As early as September, the police recorded all calls on every telephone number registered in the name of Tony V. In January 1997, shortly after some of the media had first reported on the explosive Neufchâteau files, Véronique D's father received three calls on his cell phone from none other than Tony.*13 In and on itself, it is not entirely surprising that both men would be acquainted. They are professionally active in related business verticals. Nevertheless, Véronique D's father later claims in his sole interview about the X1-saga that he had never heard of Tony V. Tony V, however, appears to know the man.*14 According to someone of Tony V's immediate entourage, with whom the authors could talk, both men know each other quite well. The cell phone number with which Tony V called Father D is registered to a company and is a super-secret number he only shares with a select audience. The man also appears to have business connections with one of the main characters in X1's story.

The atmosphere is initially quite upbeat during the fifth interview. X1 talks informally and mentions other young people - both girls and boys - whom she met in her school environment and at sex parties. The jovial atmosphere lasts until De Baets asks about 'other cases of murdered girls'.

- Do you remember any names or first names?
- (thinks and stares at the table) There were also some without names... Katia. I think her name was Katia. The first girl I, uh... When I lived in Ghent... I know several of them. But it's hard to...
- What images do you see?
- There are too many to mention. From the time I was... From the age of four until the age of fifteen, I experienced these things fairly regularly.
- What things?
- That they killed children, or that they, well... yes
- Don't hold back, speak...
- I watched them die or sometimes... before he forced me to...
- Have these events always occurred in the vicinity of Ghent or Ghent?
- No, no...
- Pff... I know in some cases... We went to the Ardennes or Luxembourg on business, and so on. Where there were forests, they sometimes... organised hunting parties. But then, for real... It all depended. It wasn't just in Ghent. I think I saw all corners of Belgium, including an enormous villa with a straw roof, somewhere...

After only a few questions, the detectives understand that X1 has begun to broach the subject of snuff movies. She talks about an individual in a BMW. Whenever she saw this vehicle - he sometimes came to pick her up after school- she knew that 'something terrible' was about to happen. These movies were recorded in a studio on an industrial estate on the outskirts of Brussels, near the motorway exit. She can describe the building quite well, and when the police identify it a month later, her description matches the gate in glass, lots of aluminium, red bricks, a square building, an aerial photograph of it in the entrance hall, waiting room with four dark brown seats and a large white ashtray on a coffee table. She describes the murder of a baby, about which Tony V insinuated

to her afterwards that it could well have been her child. The scene she depicts, especially the names and locations X1 tags, immediately gives rise to an immense scepticism within the gendarmerie leadership.

On November 6th, X1 finds herself once more in the interrogation room of the Brussels BOB. Following the turbulent weeks before and after Connerotte's ousting, the country has found something akin to peace again for the first time. But if it depends on X1 and her interrogators, this tranquillity will be short-lived. During the sixth interrogation, she recounts how, from the end of 1982, they took her with increasing regularity to 'that building', blindfolded now, and how she recalls that particular smell: Dettol, a potent disinfectant required to clean up the bloody remnants of a recording session. She recognised voices. Annie Bouty, Michel Nihoul, the man with the BMW, a friend of his who, in a later stage, also regularly picked her up in Ghent.

- You say you saw him on television later?
- Yes, it was a long time ago.
- A long time ago?
- Yes, definitely.
- Can you say in which program?
- No, no.
- On television?
- I entered the living room. The television was on. I saw him. I turned around and left for a few hours. I had seen enough.
- Did you talk to anyone about that?
- No, what would I have to say?*15

This passage could be placed into an understandable context only a few weeks later. De Baets and Hupez suspect that X1 is talking about a figure from the entourage of one of their former colleagues, Madani Bouhouche. The coincidental reunion with people from 'that building' occurs often. For example, X1 is a faithful reader of the weekly periodical Humo.

- No, but didn't you ask yourself any questions about this? As in: 'One of them I see on television and the other, the guard, I once saw in the Humo magazine?'
- Whether I asked myself questions?

- No, no. Did you not make the connection, so to speak: what is he doing here?
- No, no. (...) Because I protect myself from that, well, you know.
- Yes, but actually, for you... If you recognised them, knowing why they are there would be interesting. Did something happen to them? Were they caught?
- There are many about whom I read things if I see or recognise them, but...
- But this must intrigue you somewhat, correct? Why is that picture there?
- That's just it. I'm not interested because if I were interested in that, this would again trigger everything in me, you know...

Shortly after midnight, X1 is asked to look at more pictures. De Baets and Hupez again make it easy for her. They explain that these are people mentioned in the file 111/96 of Neufchâteau.*16 X1 nods yes several times, takes the photos in her hands, and confirms that she has had them all at one time or another as 'clients' but cannot tell more about any of the photos. Names she does not know. The photos shown to her are those of the brother of a Walloon minister, a former top military officer, a Brussels magistrate and lawyer W, whom Jean-Paul Raemaekers regularly mentioned to the police during his interrogations. She only extracts Lawyer W's photograph with some conviction from the pile, although her interrogators tell her his name. This collection also holds photos of a former prime minister, about whom X1 declared earlier that he arrived in Knokke at sex parties with children, but he had been unaware of such events. She also recognises another former top politician. Hours pass before X1 recounts another murder scene, in which she is forced to kill a little girl in front of the camera, a revolver pointing at her neck. She eventually reveals this was her child.

'Those stories of her four childbirths followed by murders, I never believed,' says Adjutant De Baets later. 'That she lost at least one child seems to me to be certain. What bothers her most is that she lost her child to history. You noticed during the interrogations that she had a strong urge always to give her lost child -or children- a place in her story. For her, that was

the most important thing. I did not see that as a deliberate lie. It was clear that she had great difficulty in finding her way in her memories. At a certain point, we got upset with her about this. She kept on mixing facts that one could verify as incorrect. And yet we had to listen, I thought. We were only at the beginning. I estimated that if we had been able to continue, it would have taken us a year or two to get a clear picture of her past. In between the interrogations, we had to verify her statements. And we did, however much we were blamed afterwards for not doing so.*17

It may be a coincidence, but the first verifications of the testimony of X1 are direct hits. This becomes clear when, on November 18, 1996 - a month after the interrogation - the Brussels police officers receive a copy of the file that the public prosecutor's office in Ghent compiled at the time concerning the murder of Carine Dellaert.*18.

It was early in the morning when the worker drove his crane into the backyard of the old cafe Neptune. The café at nr 2 Kuhlmankaai, along the Ghent-Terneuzen canal, had been empty for years and was to be demolished that day, Tuesday 24th September 1985. The work had only begun when the driver lost control of his machine. The rear wheel sank into a pit next to what had once been a toilet. When workers from the nearby Rhone-Poulenc factory rushed to the rescue to straighten the machine, the lid jumped off the cesspit. 'We saw something floating on top,' one of them recalls. 'It was a kneecap.'

A few hours later, the quay was swarming with police officers, legal experts and curious bystanders. The mortal remains of a woman lay in the cesspit. The body, or what was left of it, lay in a fetal position, gagged with a white electrical cord, hands and feet bound together. 'It was already in a very advanced state of decomposition,' a police officer remembers. 'We had to transfer the skeleton in pieces to the lab.' Little remained of the girl's clothes. In his initial report, the medical examiner spoke of a woman who must have been between 19 and 29 years old at the time of her death.*19 The expert was not just anybody. The Gent public prosecutor called in the internationally renowned legal expert Professor Jacques Timperman.*20 The body was identified based on the jewels on

the body. They immediately reminded the Gent substitute Nicole De Rouck of Carine Dellaert.

It had always been a strange affair. Carine had disappeared on August 30th, 1982. Her older sister was confined to bed sick; her brother played in the street; her mother had gone to work. Father Emile Dellaert had left the house at 2 pm. When mother came home, Carine was gone. There are no traces of a fight, no farewell note. Nothing. A week went by before Emile Dellaert reported the disappearance on September 6th. All he could hand over to the court was a blurry picture of his daughter. He claimed that this was the only one he had of her. No searches were ever carried out. The youth protection service of the public prosecutor's office followed the most obvious hypothesis: ran away because of tensions in the family. There were tensions. The parents were getting a divorce. However, it is exceptional for a sixteen-year-old girl to run away from home without her identity card, clothes or money.

Although she was often absent, Carine Dellaert was the undisputed leader at school. Her classmates jostled for her attention. She determined who belonged to the inner circle and who didn't; she taught them how to rebel and talked endlessly about a world that others had yet to discover: sex. She was very open about it,' says a classmate at the time. She had many problems. Every so often, the police were at the school gate. There was always something. Sometimes she accused a teacher of trying to rape her. As a result, people from that corner backed off from her. Any teacher with something to say about her attitude stood a chance of being accused.'*21

More than a month went by between Emile Dellaert's report and the first actual investigation into this girl's disappearance. During her first interrogation, her mother immediately expressed suspicions about her ex-husband, who -she claims-seemed more concerned about the division of the estate than about his daughter. She was sure that her ex 'knows more'. When she was questioned again two months later, she called his attitude 'abnormal'. 'He is far too comfortable with her disappearance, she thought. Tomorrow, he will remove Carine's furniture and other possessions,' Noëlla Bovyn

explained to Youth Protection Services in October 1982.*22 The father did fetch Carine Dellaert's belongings at the end of October 1982. And he certainly was not a great help to the investigation. Only after repeated calls from the Youth Protection Service did Dellaert hand over four more recent photographs of his daughter; during this search, it came to light that he sometimes took suggestive pictures of his daughter.

The crucial hours and days after the disappearance of Julie Lejeune, Mélissa Russo, An Marchal, Eefje Lambrecks and Loubna Benaïssa were often discussed in Belgium as watershed moments for the investigation. In Carine Dellaert's case, the Ghent public prosecutor's office took a year and three months to act. Only in December 1983 was the enquiry dossier transferred to the public prosecutor's office. The Gent BOB received instructions to investigate the girl's neighbourhood. Although somewhat belated, this still yielded some remarkable findings. Father Dellaert appeared to have given his daughter's clothes to his new girlfriend and forced her to wear them. Only then did the police discover that a judicial inquiry had already been launched in 1977 against Emile Dellaert for incest. On 30 January 1977, the then ten-year-old Carine Dellaert was interrogated. She accused her father in child-like phrases. Father Dellaert embellished the facts, and he escaped conviction.*23

Emile Dellaert led an eventful life. In June 1965, ten months before Carine's birth, he had already left his wife once before. He returned at the end of 1969 after a three-week stay in the Netherlands with an underage girl. He had lost his job at the UCO textile factory by that time. At the end of 1977, Noëlla Bovyn tried to have her children placed. During this period, Dellaert ended up in a psychiatric institution and even attempted suicide. Although convicted once for sexual offences -outside the family- he enjoyed support in Ghent socialist circles. He could get a job in an OCMW hospital, and when he was sent away from there, too, because of alleged vice offences, the city of Ghent subsequently employed him as a parking meter collector.*24

The neighbourhood inquiry further revealed that Dellaert was a very authoritarian head of household. There were also complaints of sexual abuse of his second daughter. Carine Dellaert tended to cry out loud in the weeks before her disappearance. According to a friend, she had become afraid of the dark and had a crushing fear of forests and woodland areas. Her scout leader, supported in this by other witnesses, stated 'that father and daughter behaved like a couple in love.'*25

The inquiry was in the hands of the Ghent investigating judge Pieters. He was very aware of the ambiguity of the testimonies against father Dellaert. More often than not, husbands and wives use heavy artillery against each other in their mutual struggle in divorce proceedings. Noëlla Bovyn, the mother of Carine Dellaert, launched a series of accusations in March 1984, which she had not raised before. Before her disappearance, Carine wore a sleeveless white blouse with black vertical stripes and an elasticated waist. 'Fourteen days later, I found that blouse had been returned to the closet, and it had been washed', she claimed. 'It had been washed with a different brand of washing powder than mine.' Because an argument had erupted because he had taken all of her belongings, Emile Dellaert later returned one of his daughter's wardrobes to the mother. To her dismay, she noticed that it contained maternity clothes.*26 Carine's brother, in turn, told the BOB that in the days following the disappearance, he had noticed a spade and a red blanket in the garage.

To the extent that others did not, Emile Dellaert made himself a suspect. On June 13, 1984, he wrote to the public prosecutor to report the findings of a clairvoyant he had visited in Schiedam in the Netherlands. This clairvoyant -wrote Dellaert- saw these things: a boat, a sandy plain, a sand mountain, a meadow, a bridge with a green fence, water and tall trees... All these elements were present at the Kuhlman quay a year later. The police questioned the psychic but could remember no visit from Emile Dellaert. This raised the suspicion that Dellaert had made up the story to gauge the investigation's progress. According to Dellaert, the hypothetical psychic 'saw' something else: a diary and a baby.*27

On October 1, 1985, Emile Dellaert was arrested based on three new elements. A coffee spoon that belonged to the household goods of his country house had been found in the cesspit. A former neighbour stated that he often heard Carine Dellaert calling for help when she was alone with her father. The day after the arrest, Carine's brother testified that he saw with his own eyes how his father loaded a car full of 'things' on the day of the disappearance. He noticed the red sheet in the trunk. It looked as if there was something underneath. The Ghent public prosecutor wanted to keep Emile Dellaert in pre-trial detention for as long as possible. However, Dellaert had an excellent lawyer, Mr Piet Van Eeckhaut. On 27 December 1985, he convinced the Chamber of Indictments that the case was 'solely based on gossip'. Dellaert was released, and the investigation began to falter. In early 1989, another man surfaced who had shared the cell with Dellaert and now claimed that Dellaert had confessed to him at the time that he was the perpetrator. During a confrontation, the illiterate man cut a pitiful figure. When this trail yielded no results either, the judicial file GE.30.18.182411/85 was sent back to the public prosecutor under the heading 'no further action'—end of the investigation.

It should not be surprising if X1 would have come across some news about these events over the years. In the 1960s, her father worked in the same textile factory as Emile Dellaert. X1's cousin, Daniël Poupaert, says that he still knew Carine Dellaert because, like him, she was a member of the scouts' group De Zwaluw. At the beginning of 1998, Poupaert declared to the Ghent BOB that everyone in the scouts' group was shocked when the corpse was found and that he often talked about it, also to X1's parents: 'Regina was there, overheard what I said and did not react to it.'*28

Even though later on in the X1-saga, Daniel Poupaert would turn out to be the most combative defender of the family honour and would not shy away from the occasional lie; this could well be the simple explanation why X1 identifies Emile Dellaert from the start as one of the 'small potatoes' of the network.*29 Ghent citizens who followed the case closely always knew he was the only suspect. The 'hearsay' hypothesis may also hold regarding her mentioning the correct school and

Carine's correct age, but it falls apart when X1 talks about Clo's pregnancy. The fact that Carine Dellaert had just become pregnant at the time of her disappearance was never reported in the press and was something that her brother, for example, only learned in early 1998.

Doctor Jacques Timperman arrived at 11.30 on the morning of September 24 at the place where the body had been fished out of the cesspit in three pieces. In his report about the initial findings, he mentions a woman with voluptuous breasts and buttocks. Furthermore, his report notes 'a piece of soft wooden tissue at the level of the pelvis.' The doctor signals that this is 'a fragment of a laminaria dilator'. The laminaria dilator is made from the root of the laminaria digitata, which is a scarce plant that, as far as is known, only grows on the Irish coast. What is unique about this plant is how it reacts to moisture. The tissue can absorb an enormous amount of water and expand very quickly. In this way, laminaria dilators were used in ancient medicine to speed up deliveries or induce abortions. The drug is used very little because it causes excruciating pain to the mother.

There must have been a reason for a laminaria dilator in Carine Dellaert's pelvis. The only logical explanation seems to be an induced and harrowing delivery, precisely as X1 described. Carine Dellaert's pregnancy is not mentioned in so many words in the Timperman report. However, he points out that the girl was wearing a bra with a 90C cup, a large size that is much larger than Carine Dellaert usually wears, according to her mother and her sister. In this regard, Timperman says in his report, 'The presence of a rectangular piece of gauze on the cup indicates swelling of the breasts and loss of fluid, which frequently occurs in nulliparae.'*30

When Neufchâteau investigator Stefan Liesenborgs prepares a synthesis report on the Dellaert file twelve years later, he has never heard of the term 'nulliparae', so he does some research in a medical encyclopaedia.

'Nulliparae are pregnant women for the first time,' he adds as a footnote to his report. That is not 100 per cent correct, and Liesenborgs cannot foresee that that footnote will later become the focus of yet another X1 controversy. With medical

encyclopedias in hand, some media outlets postulate that nullipara, on the contrary, is the medical term for women 'who have never been pregnant.' Since the Timperman report uses the term nullipara, it is said this is proof that Carine Dellaert was never pregnant. The public prosecutor in Ghent will make the same decision a few weeks later. Strange. It is sufficient to open a medical encyclopedia and see what it says under nullipara: 'Woman who has not yet given birth to a child.' It does not say it would refer to a woman who has never been pregnant. And if you surf the Internet or consult a few textbooks on obstetrics, you'll see right away that nullipara is used everywhere in practice to refer to women who are pregnant for the first time.*31

Liesenborgs was not wrong after all. In a December 1997 'case of the month' medical contribution on the website of the Inselspital in Bern, the Swiss Doctor R. Koller talks about a 25-year-old nullipara who is 28 weeks pregnant while already having had an abortion.*32

Anyone who reads the Timperman report carefully will immediately notice the context in which the term is used. He points out that the swelling of her breasts and the loss of fluid 'frequently occurs' in nulliparous women. Anyone who refuses to acknowledge this statement is defending nothing more than the proposition that it refers specifically to sixteen-year-old girls who are not pregnant but constantly suffer from rapidly swelling breasts and moisture loss. In short, the report contains very concrete elements stating that Carine Dellaert was pregnant.

The police report on the ascertainment of the girl's corpse mentions other intriguing passages, especially about the objects found in the cesspit. There were nineteen in total, mainly coins and jewellery. But also: 'Two razor blades of the brand Gillette'.

On September 29th, during her second interrogation, X1 provided some details about the places where she met Clo for the first time. One of the things she raises is a bar along the Drongensesteenweg in Ghent called Co-Cli-Co, which no longer exists today. She gives an accurate description of the bar's location. Further investigation informs the detectives that Carine Dellaert also lived at the Drongensesteenweg, at

number 82. The bar was located at number 215 and was run by a certain Gustaaf D. The BOB officers reencountered this name on November 30 when X1 showed them the villa where Clo was born. At the designated address, there once was a firm in which Gustaaf D. was one of the partners. It may be a coincidence, but it does seem to point to a connection between the bar and the villa that would be impossible for an outsider to suspect.*33

The investigation will never progress beyond this point. How the Verwilghen Commission dealt with a few magistrates just before the turn of the year caused the initial sympathy for 'the Neufchâteau cell' within the judicial caste into indignation. It is no different in Ghent.

NOTES:

1. Lifetime, Regina Louf, 1989 (unpublished manuscript). The authors made some minor linguistic corrections.
2. Fax X1, 14 May 1997, BOB Brussels, pv 151.556.
3. Interrogation X1, 25 October 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 116.018. Emmanuel Vande Broek translated them on 6 December 1996, PV 117.985. The authors converted the quoted passages back into Dutch from the French.
4. This is clear from all the statements made on the subject afterwards by the investigators of the time, either to the authors or in the judicial inquiry conducted on the subject.
5. During the seventeen first hearings, X1 was confronted with dozens of photographs in all possible forms - bordered, not bordered, stapled, not stapled, bound by paperclip and so forth...
6. X1 mentions the name of a very well-known company in Ghent.
7. BOB Brussels, 28 October 1996, PV 116.179.
8. Interrogation Sandra D., BOB Brussels, 9 January 1997, PV 100.395.
9. BOB Brussels, 28 October 1996, PV 116.255.
10. BOB
Brussels, 29 October 1996, PV 116.262.

11. The names of the doctors were converted into fictitious names.
12. Interrogation X1, 31 October 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 116.022. Translated into French on 9 December 1996, PV 119.128. The quoted passages have been converted back into Dutch by the authors from French.
13. These calls were recorded on January 4 at 3:46 p.m. and January 24 at 3:40 p.m. and 5:10 p.m. BOB Brussels, May 14, 1997, PV 151.511.
14. Tin, February 10, 1998.
15. Interrogation X1, 6 November 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 116.024. Kirsten Van Grimbergen translated them into French on 16 January 1997, PV 100.641. The authors converted the quoted passages back into Dutch from the French.
16. The investigation that has been opened concerning the statements of Jean-Paul Raemaekers is concerned here.
17. Interview with Patriek De Baets, December 21, 1998.
18. Suspicion s that De Baets and Hupez led X1 to her story about 'Clo' through suggestive questions and privileged information contradict the chronology.
19. La Dernière Heure, 26 September 1985.
20. The now-retired Timperman examined 6,000 corpses during his career and can boast of forty years of experience at home and abroad.
21. Interview with a former pupil of the city elementary school Sisters Loveling, December 1, 1998.
22. Interrogations Noëlla Bovyn, 10 October and 20 December 1982, included in synopsis BOB Brussels, 7 January 1997, PV 100.242.

23. Synthesis
note BOB Brussels, January 7, 1997, PV 100.242.
24. Ibidem
25. Ibidem
26. Interrogat
ion of Noëlla Bovyn, Ghent police force, 14 March 1984.
27. Synopsis
Brussels BOB, January 7, 1997, PV 100.242.
28. Interrogat
ion Daniël Poupaert, BOB Ghent, January 29, 1998, PV
100.368.
29. `She
called me... the pimp of my daughter!" Emile Dellaert in
Blik, 5 May 1998.
30. Autopsy
report Carine Dellaert, Professor Jacques Timperman, 25
September 1985, included in synopsis BOB Brussels,
January 7, 1997, PV 100.242.
31. 'Tradition
ally, one 3 two hours was considered the upper limit for
the normal duration of the expulsion phase at the
nullipara, for example, write the scientists Michel
Boulvain and William Fraser in a contribution on
`functional anomalies in the progression of childbirth'.
The word nullipara appears three times in their text, each
time concerning highly pregnant women just before they
give birth. The article can be found on the Internet:
http://matweb.hcuge.ch/matweb/obst/ob_bulletin/volume_21/21-2-4-1.html (link out of date)
- 32.
33. The
article can be found at the following:
http://www.anaesthesia.unibe.ch/html%20english/fal1297_e.htm (link out of date)
34. Findings
BOB Brussels, 30 November 1996, PV 116.252

4. 'It was so.... um... They burned her.'

X1, the morning of 14 November 1996

If there is one moment when prosecutor Michel Bourlet must have wondered whether uttering the words "Si on me laisse faire" (if only they let me be) was such a wise move, it was the early morning of November 14th 1996, during a long drive along a deserted E411 on his way to the province of Luxembourg.*1 In recent weeks, there has been much talk among investigators and magistrates about X1. The prevailing feeling is that even a tenth of her story was accurate; it could well be that the Dutroux case has been a mere prologue to the implosion of the kingdom of Belgium.

That night, Bourlet met the mysterious centre of attention in the flesh for the first time: a petite, headstrong & sharp lady. She did not correspond to the image that had spontaneously formed in the minds of all those who had read the judicial documents about her. Bourlet did not understand the totality of the interrogation, which was conducted entirely in Dutch while his mother tongue was French. The endless silences struck him the most. The often clumsy attempts by Patriek De Baets and Philippe Hupez to break through them. The weeping and the swallowing of pain from re-opened mental wounds and memories. Michel Bourlet has gone quiet, as have the national magistrates André Vandoren, Patrick Duinslaeger, and Lieutenant Alexandre Michot of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBO).*2 All of them have joined BOB Peter De Waele, the cameraman, in the cramped control room where the interrogations are recorded. They want to experience 'the investigation of the century' for themselves.

When they leave the building of the Brussels BOB that morning, the credibility of X1 is not a point of discussion. They

have observed the character of this lady and the ordeal she puts herself through to be able to tell her story. At no point does it occur to them that there are worldwide examples of similar investigative cases based solely on the statements of young women with false memory syndrome stemming from poorly processed incest experiences in their past.

Adjutant De Baets, who had insisted on the foursome's presence, knows he is being observed. The interrogation, which started shortly before 11 pm, got off to an awkward start. The last few days have seen many changes in his relationship with X1. She increasingly calls him to report something that came to mind or correct a previously revealed memory. She behaves more spontaneously during the trips to and from Ghent than in this interrogation room. Thus, it happened that at the end of the interrogation on October 25th, just before she stepped off the train in Ghent, she unexpectedly announced that she could remember a lot of names of girls who had not survived the network. She rattled them off at lightning speed. Leaving the car perplexed, De Baets and Hupez cursorily wrote down the names they thought they remembered. Kristien, Mieke, Marie-Hélène... Or did she say that Mieke and Marie-Hélène were the same person? Several Neufchâteau witnesses who went through the same interrogation procedure later recount how the camera paralysed them. The upright microphone involuntarily reminded Nathalie W of a phallic symbol. X2 did not want a camera. After some interviews, it appears as if X1 fears mostly herself. Photographs prompt a panic reaction, as was evident from previous interrogations. It is an exact science, and in the TV quiz, she has turned these interrogations into pointing out the wrong photo equals the verdict: thanks, you were an acceptable candidate, but you didn't make the cut. For De Baets and Hupez, it is not always possible to determine whether her stubborn silence during photo confrontations is related to ignorance or dissociated shock. The magistrates behind the window are also left to guess. They look on, terrified, in a constant dilemma between leaving or waiting until the end.

- It was about the first interrogation when we showed you an album with pictures of certain persons. You said that you did not know these people.
- That's what I said, yes.
- Is that correct? Don't you know these people?
- I do, but I didn't want to say it then.
- Why didn't you want to say it at the time?
- Mistrust.
- Do you still distrust us now?
- (Nodding no.)*3

X1 initially doesn't do more than nod, sometimes no, sometimes yes. She looks around somewhat helplessly. 'Yes, well, I suppose I have to do it too,' she breaks the oppressive silence after De Baets mentioned the names Marc Dutroux, Michèle Martin, and Bernard Weinstein.

She has known these people, she says. This is of great importance for the legal context of ongoing investigations. If it is true that these people were part of a network as described by X1, then the facts she experienced are inherently part of the core Dutroux-dossier in Neufchâteau.

- Can you situate in what period you became acquainted with these people?
- (Nods no)... I don't remember exactly.
- Are you sure you saw them?
- You're correct about something you saw on television or...
- No, no.

X1 sits cross-legged in her chair and lowers her head. It appears as if she will say no more the entire night. Then, eventually:

- I got to know them through Nihoul. This may seem unlikely to you, but they have known each other for a long time.
- What?
- I say they've known each other for a very long time. That may sound unlikely, but it is the truth.
- Who do you think knows who?
- Nihoul and Dutroux have known each other for a very long time.

- That is what you say. But where did you first see them together?
- With him, at his house.
- With whom?
- With Nihoul.
- Who brought you?
- My mother.
- Your mother? Is she alone?
- (Nods, yes.)
- How old are you then?
- I don't know.
- What kind of car is it? A Chevrolet.
- A Chevrolet?
- (Nods, yes.) An X11.
- How?
- It's just funny, X11.
- The license plate?
- No, no, the model.
- Ah, yes, the model. Okay. Now I understand. It's funny.

Humour helps. X1 describes what she remembers of the 'Brussels milieu'. This group occasionally meets at Nihoul's apartment. Her mother has brought her, along with a man she briefly hangs out with during this period. 'It's much easier for me to talk about it when someone other than my mother has brought me,' she says. 'I don't know... when Tony brought me, it's different. I don't know what I did wrong to her or how I could make anything right. Why couldn't she stand me? A pressing question from Hupez: didn't she have to go to school then? No, it usually happened on the weekends. She already lived in Ghent, she remembers, and she still went to elementary school. So, she is referring to a period when she was eleven or twelve years old.

The often contradictory or impossible time indications given by X1 that night will lay at the core of the dismantling of the investigations named after her a year later. It is not always clear which date she exactly connects with which event. Initially, she speaks of a specific event in one particular apartment in Brussels when she was eleven. A bit later, from her words - 'in those two years' - one can deduce that she describes how things went on afterwards or in general within this network. Lawyer E is part of it and is an illustrious

unknown character who she estimates to be about 1 metre 70 centimetres tall and wears dark glasses. She can say little about Dutroux. She sees him sporadically as an introverted newcomer in the role of a second-rate figure. He likes 'games' and sometimes brings his two German shepherds.*4 She recounts an event where Dutroux releases one of his dogs as they push her headfirst into a seat. Question from De Baets: did those dogs have names? Can she remember them?

- From that first one, I remember. His name was... Uh, I can't recall the name of the other one...
- What was the name of the first one?
- His name was Brutus.
- Didn't you hear the name of the other one?
- I don't remember, really, I don't remember.
- Okay, but didn't you hear how his wife or someone else pronounced the name?
- (After a long silence.) Sultan.
- Who called the other dog Sultan, do you think?
- His wife.

It took some time for Marc Dutroux to realise what his interrogators were getting at when, on December 2nd, 1996, they began to bombard him with questions about the dogs he had owned over the years. 'In 1976, at the time of my first marriage, I had a Malinois Shepherd, and his name was Black,' he responds. 'I also had a female German shepherd, Diane. Later, I owned some other ones. Two German shepherds. Their names were Chera and Sultan.'*5

The dog Sultan was probably not born until late 1993 or early 1994. Therefore, it is not possible that X1 knew about this dog in the early 1980s. Yet the question remains: how could she know this? As far as the investigators can tell, the press has never mentioned the names of Dutroux's dogs. The fact that they had to turn to Marc Dutroux himself at the beginning of December indicates that no one knew the name Sultan until then. Did Dutroux name his dog in 1994 in memory of his previous one? Did X1 confuse two events? Is it an accidentally correct guess? Until today, the guesswork remains on the proper explanation.

After midnight, X1 continues her story:

- I must say that after some time, when I was about twelve, I knew all about rituals, about ritual killings. Of all those things, I knew precisely how they were executed. The phrases they uttered, the signs they drew, and my role. For example, there were different ways of slaughtering or strangling a victim.
- Who taught you those techniques?
- Nihoul and his wife were very much into that at the time. Dutroux was not a fanatic; it didn't interest him so much, but his friend was.
- The friend of?
- Of Dutroux.
- Do you know him, this friend of Dutroux's?
- (Nods, yes.)
- Can you give him a name?
- Weinstein. Did you know that one of his favourite games was to bury animals alive? Very funny, no?

Although the enquiry will later reveal that Bernard Weinstein did indeed have a very morbid relationship with animals, the role that X1 attributes to him seems improbable at this stage. She says she met him when she was twelve in 1981, which could not have been the case as Weinstein was in prison in France until late 1985. Her interrogators assume that there is a reasonable chance that X1 knew Weinstein but must have 'replaced' him as the perpetrator in her memory. Upon pronouncing the word 'ritual', X1 corrects herself. The aim was to eliminate a child's determination to resist by forcing it to choose between the death of a beloved pet or assisting in the torture of another child. Well, you know, all this stuff about satanic notions and such... pfft. It really was more about the pleasure of killing animals - the pleasure to...'

- To what?
- If I did it right, and this comes down to the same thing, if I did things the correct way... then they hurt another girl.
- What's the same thing?
- The "fun" part came at the end. If I did well, they hurt another girl. But if I didn't do it right, they would hurt me—their method (...). One of the most unpredictable and difficult things was the lottery. For example, they decided which of the two girls would suffer the most.

- Who is the second girl you're talking about?
- Kristien, among others.
- What did you say?
- Kristien, among others.

An oppressive silence descends in the interrogation room. Kristien is one of the names X1 mentioned on October 25. De Baets and Hupez had been pondering about old murder cases that might correspond to the first names X1 mentioned in the car. The name Kristien rang a bell. Wasn't that the name of that girl from the "champignonnière" (mushroom farm) crime? It was one of those mysterious cases that the public had long forgotten. 'Didn't that murder case get resolved?' De Baets tried to recall. If I'm not mistaken, they arrested some punks then, and they confessed to the murder.' Hupez wasn't sure and resolved to find out.

It was national magistrate Patrick Duinslaeger who confronted the investigators with the facts. The murder of 16-year-old Christine Van Hees had never been solved. The evidence to convict the gang of punks had not been conclusive. Within 48 hours, the detectives believe they have identified no less than three victims identified by X1: Christine Van Hees, Carine Dellaert and Véronique D.*7 Immediately afterwards, on the 29th of October 1996, first sergeant Michel De Mulder went to collect some photos from the girl's parents.*8 X1 gets to see them at the end of the interrogation.

It's past three in the morning. In the control room, there is much yawning. X1 still looks relatively perky.

- Who is Kristien? Where did you get to know her?
- I got to know her in these circumstances. I know it's really tough.
- It's tough to follow you at the moment.
- It's tough because... I am... trying to...
- We can stop for five minutes so that you can collect your thoughts.
- No, no, it's been so long, and I'm trying. Every week, I'm in a different place.
- But can you establish some location somewhere...
- I fear this will drive me crazy...

- But can you situate this now? You've told us all about your education, which probably... At what age does your training begin, and when does it become intense?
- Yes, something happened nearly every week after I had experienced that weekend.
- Every week. What happens then? Did people take you somewhere?
- Yes.
- Was there a specific person who took you to these places?
- Nearly always, yes.
- And who are these people who usually take you?
- Usually, it's Nihoul or Tony who took me there.

A long silence falls again. X1 eventually breaks it with an outburst of anger.

- You want me to say it plain and simple, but don't you understand?! How do you want me to explain it when these things happened so goddamn often? Well, then you go out of your mind! Honestly, I don't know any longer! I genuinely don't!
- What? You must tell us.
- Where, how, pff...
- What happened to Kristien?
- She was sacrificed.

After she utters these words, X1 looks utterly defeated.

- Can we isolate that fact someplace and explore it further?
- At that time, I was really... It's one of the most challenging things for me, really, the most difficult. Because, for example, one of those things... First of all, we were still with Kristien... I was sent to a customer, I was doing him, and when I was finished, they came to get me and immediately took me... (long silence). That means that we had to go there for a long time... I had been there for a long time. All I know is that Kristien... She was a... She was just a friend. (long silence). I don't manage... I have a hard time making sense of it. I can't manage to get that into... my head. I can't clearly picture it. I've tried everything (silence). Anyone who has been through that... can't. I'm sorry.
- Will you listen for a moment?

- Yes, I'm listening.
- Can we try a few questions?
- I'm trying.
- Can you explain when you met Kristien?
- I got acquainted with that girl during the "education". And in fact, there was an ongoing rivalry.
- Ok, can you picture this girl?
- What do I remember about her? Her voice, her manner of moving, her face... vaguely.
- Are you trying to see her face in your mind?
- (Nods, yes.)
- Let's go through it chronologically by asking questions. When did you meet her? How old were you then?
- About eleven.
- Was it during the "education"?
- Yes, it was.
- How old was she?
- I couldn't say.
- Do you see her in front of you?
- Yes and no. I'm terrified of going back. You have no idea.
- If you saw pictures, would you recognise her? Would it help?
- I don't know, I don't know, what would help. All I know is that she's there, in the group of people who are the hardest to reach.
- Yes, but Hope could help us. Would Hope cooperate when he sees the pictures?' *9 (Hope is one of X1's male alter personalities)
- 'With pictures, yes, perhaps.
- Shall we try it? Let's do that to see if it helps.

It doesn't help that the investigators present X1 with an album containing five enlarged photocopies of portraits of teenage girls. The middle photo, designated by the code X1-12, is a photocopy of the photo collected from Christine Van Hees's parents two weeks earlier. The four other photographs (given the codes P10, P11, P13 and P14) have already been shown to X1. They were part of the series from which X1 pointed out Carine Dellaert.

- Oh, my goodness. Not again, not again, these pictures... Do you know what's strange? Those feelings come back to me

(silence). I'd like to know if there's anything more amusing than this. I don't want to. I want to do it, but I can't.

- Who can help us?
- Those who have experienced it... If I had been good. If I had been like that, my mother would have accepted it in the end, and it wouldn't have happened (long silence). How they treat adults then, I don't know. I don't want to... They're not allowed to look at the adults; they're not allowed! They don't want to... I can't find a way to... (long silence). I don't see any possibility, I'm sorry. I really tried my best.
- But you said that you had a photographic memory, did you not?
- (Nods, yes.)
- And did you recognise her among these photographs?
- (Nods, yes.)
- Have you seen her now?
- I want to say yes, but it's so hard because... I can't. I can't say it because she doesn't want me to. But even though she doesn't want to, I've recognised her, yes.
- Here, amongst these pictures?
- (Nods, yes.)
- You're not allowed to say... Please give me a sign when you get to the right photo. Just a sign. Did you recognise her?
- No, I did not.
- Then who did?
- Kelly. (another of X1's alters)

It goes on like this for another half hour. De Baets calls again for 'Hope' to emerge, but he, too, is unresponsive. 'Oh well, I know it doesn't make any sense, and you can't do much with any of this,' X1 sighs. "Awakening some of my alter personas makes me relive that terrible night", she says. And that is precisely what she has wanted to avoid at all costs all these years. It is almost four o'clock in the morning. De Baets doesn't give up. He wants to know who was there—the same people as during that weekend, she answers, including Weinstein.

- She cried so hard... so loudly so that someone would hear her.
- Did no one hear her?
- Someone would have heard her if something had been nearby. Houses or anything like that.

- Were there no houses in the area? Was there anything else?
- I don't know, I don't remember.
- Were there other buildings?
- I don't know. I am trying to remember. It's like this... it's so... I can't, I can't.
- Did she call for a long time?
- (Nodding yes.)
- Who made her cry?
- Dutroux, Nihoul, his wife (...).
- Did they use objects? Do you see those objects? Can you see them? Can you describe them?
- That's how they taught me.
- Taught you what?
- That's how they taught me. They taught me that it would get worse if I would ever tell.
- Now, it can't get any worse. You are with us (...).
- I am not afraid of you but of them. I'm afraid. I'm petrified. It's such a difficult choice—and for those who have witnessed it (silence). I am so scared to make a mistake. I've made so many mistakes. I've made so many...
- With us, you cannot make mistakes.

While De Baets continues to talk to X1, the investigators in the control room look at each other in acknowledgement. The age that X1 claims to be at the time of the murder cannot be accurate but given the trauma that the young woman is struggling with, this seems like an irrelevant detail. Some time passes before X1 makes any statement about Kristien again. An atmosphere of relentless competition was created between them by Tony and by Nihoul, she says. Whoever 'did' less well than the other one was punished. Kristien was punished harder than she was. Hence the feelings of guilt.

- So how did they punish her?
- By torturing her.
- And who tortured her?
- Those men who were there.
- All of them?
- Hm.
- Can you say how they tortured her?
- Oh, with everything, everything.
- Could Kristien defend herself?

- (Nods no.)
- Why not?
- Because she couldn't.
- Why couldn't she?
- Because she was tied up.

The tension in the control room is rising. One of the few facts those present know about the Van Hees case is that at the time, the remains of a molten electric wire were found around the burned corpse and that from the position of the corpse; it was clear that the hands, feet and neck had tied the girl up. X1 does not want to explain how this was done. Again, the interrogators try to encourage her: 'Shall we help her? The two of us together?' 'I don't know, I'm so scared that.... I'll never forget it.'

- I'll try... They got her. They got her... I think it was a broomstick or something that they fastened behind her back. You know... with her arms behind her back and her arms like this... something like that (silence). And then they took her, and they held her. I think they put something in her vagina then.
- Who did that?
- I had to calm her down. She was -- they wanted coffee. Euh, Nihoul, Dutroux and E. helped.
- Nihoul, Dutroux and E.?
- Yes, and the other one... I don't remember his name. He pushed her. I wanted her to shut up, but she wouldn't. She had to shut up. If not, they were going to do the same to me.
- And you couldn't get her to shut up? Was she in so much pain? You had to shut her up?
- (Nodding yes.) I had a hard time doing that. I didn't try very hard. I was so... gosh, at that time...
- What are you trying to do to shut her up?
- I put my hand on her mouth; I didn't even dare to push hard.

X1 starts to weep, mutters something about what they are forcing her to do with a fire poker that E. had pushed into her hands, and then suddenly says something about a boa constrictor. De Baets tries to get her out of her state of semi-hysteria by reminding her that she was only a child and that there is no reason for any guilt for what happened. He draws

long silences, improbable twists, chaos, and more and more references to her alter personas. It was her fault, she repeats. An as-yet-unidentified object is pushed into her vagina, and then she collapses. 'When you're in so much pain, you just don't want to believe that it will pass, like last time.' It's after five in the morning.

- Is Kristien still on the table?
- Uh-huh
- Is she tied up?
- Uh-huh
- Is Kristien still lying on her back or her stomach?
- On her back.
- On her back. Do you have to cut her throat?
- (Nods, yes.)
- And then the cries stop?
- Yes.
- Do they do anything after that? Do they still hurt you?
- (Nods, yes.)
- Do they rape you?
- (Nods, yes.)
- All of them?
- (Nods, yes.)
- Is Dutroux's wife there? Will she stay in that place for long? Will Bouty remain in that place for long?
- I don't know.
- Do you smell something at that place?
- I know very well that, uh... that... I know very well that...
- Is there a smell in that place?
- Yes, there is.
- Can you describe the smell?
- No.
- Is there anyone else who can describe that smell?
- If you already know what's happening, why do you want me to say it?
- If what?
- If you already know what's happening, why do you want me to say it?
- No, I don't. I don't know what happened. I may know what happened, but you'd have to help me to... You don't want to help.
- Yes, I would. It was so, so... uh... They burned her.

- They what??
- They burned her.

Tears are still rolling down her face. In the control room, X1's last three words have removed even more doubts. The Kristien X1 is talking about could only have been Christine Van Hees. De Baets, however, realises that he has a problem. Much has come to light this night, but that one all-important detail, the time of the murder, is bothering him.

- Please let us know in what period it happened.
- That's another thing I have to think about constantly. I am trying to discover it. At that time, time was an abstract notion to me.
- Can you arrive at that period through a comparison?
- Uh, I don't know.
- How were those people dressed, for example?
- Gee... I don't know. Uh, I don't know.
- Was it cold in that place?
- That's another abstract thing I haven't paid attention to.
- Hm.
- Besides, I'm never cold (...).
- Did you know Kristien for a long time before that?
- A long time is a lot to say, but at least some time.
- Do you know who took care of Kristien?
- Nihoul.
- Was it a girl trained by Nihoul?
- (Nods, yes.)
- Did she never tell you how she became acquainted with Nihoul?
- Not really.
- Not really?
- I told you we were competitors.
- Yes. Did you never have a chance to talk to her?
- (Nods no.)
- Did she speak French or Dutch?
- A little... like me. She understood both.
- You must understand that doesn't help us.
- No (...).
- Can you say how she was dressed on the day of the crime?
- I remember her wearing sneakers with laces, jeans, and a sweater with the number eight.

- Do you remember the colour of the sweater?
- Uh, dark blue, not black, but very dark blue with an eight on it, like in American football.

X1 draws the eight in double white lines on paper, indicating its size with her hands.

- So, she was a girl of Nihoul's, you say? Is that correct? Can you look anywhere, or is there anyone who can tell us how long she has been with Nihoul? Did you see her there?
- During the training, I think. And then I met her afterwards.
- Was the training in 1982?
- Yes, I suppose so, yes.
- So you're twelve, thirteen years old?
- It was earlier. It started at our house after Knokke, and the training ended the day before my second communion.
- And that training lasts about a year, where they take you everywhere?
- Yes.

X1's statements about Kristien being bilingual strengthen the interrogators' conviction that she is indeed referring to Christine Van Hees. She has never been told that the victim is a Brussels girl whose mother is from Ostend and speaks almost as much Dutch as French.

- Do you know or see who tied up Kristien?
- Uh... it's the executioner... Dutroux and Nihoul.
- Did they tie her up in a particular way?
- Yes, but please don't ask me to describe it.
- Why? Don't you know? You told us that at one point, she was tied to a broom handle with her back or hands. Were her hands tied or something?
- Yeah, uh, sure.
- So, is she tied up in any other way? Do they untie her from that brush handle?
- First, they let her loose to hunt her down for a while (...).
- And then tie her up a second time?
- (nods yes)
- Do you see, with your photographic memory, how they tied her up?

- They tied her up, they put her on a table, with her legs spread, her feet on the legs of the table, well.... It's hard to explain, and they tie her up in this distinctive way.
- Her legs to the feet of the table?
- Her hands stretched out behind her.
- Tied up too?
- Hmhm.
- So, is there any other way to tie her up?
- It's well enough devised.
- How?
- That it's devised quite well.
- Can you describe it step by step?
- Oh, my God, no. Not really... but it reminds me of a rabbit in a trap. The more it struggles, the more awkward it gets.

De Baets is pushing for more details. Does she see her arms? Are they tied up somewhere? And her legs, are they tied? Her legs, are they folded? Does that cord go from her hands to her feet? X1 answers all these questions by nodding yes. 'Like I say, like a rabbit.'

- Is the place where that happened big?
- Pff...
- Is there anyone who can see...
- Anyway... it's not small (...).
- Is there anyone who can help us to give a description maybe?
- Beams in the ceiling.
- Beams in the ceiling?
- I think it was a floor made of natural stone. I don't know if it was a stone floor. I guess it was a rather old floor and white-painted walls, but from a long time ago.
- Are you getting to that place straight away?
- Uh, it was apparent that it wasn't inhabited.
- Do you see yourself getting out of the car?
- I'm trying to, yes (...)Gosh... I know it's quite an uneven path to get there.
- I think behind the house, where the inhabitants lived, I came in through the left-hand side, ah yes...
- Would you describe it as a house?
- So you have that house there. First, there was, there had to be...

- Will you be able to recognise the surroundings?
- I hope so, yes.
- When you got there, was it light or dark?
- Light.
- Shall we interrupt the interrogation here and, uh... Could we ask you to make another effort on your part? Could you look at the photos again? Please?
- Oh, um...
- It's important.
- I know it's important.
- Did you just say you saw her? In these pictures?
- Oh, it would be better to... Why?? Isn't it possible to do it simply? Wouldn't it suffice if I said that I don't remember? That's not so difficult, is it?
- No, because you are honest, you mustn't say that.
- Oh, well...
- The officer can leaf through the pictures, and then you say when.
- Please no...
- We've already managed to get through the text part.
- Yes, a text we do have.
- Will you do it yourself, or do you need the officer to do it?
- I can't do it; I know it's stupid, but... I don't know.
- We can do it together.
- All I know is that from today, I'll have to start fighting with my alters. I simply can't.
- Try.
- I can't (...).
- It only took you one second to recognise her earlier. You can do it again.
- I don't think that's fair. If you know who it is, why must I endure all this misery again?
- It's not us who have to be convinced; other people need to be convinced. Do you understand? (...).
- I'm terrified of this responsibility.
- But it's not your responsibility.
- But it is...
- Responsibility towards who?
- If I don't say it, who will say it?
- Is there no one who can help us?
- Well, I wonder if this responsibility... It's stupid.
- It's not stupid; it's human.

- And if I point out the wrong one? I'm terrified of that... I'll still be capable of doing that. I'm afraid of making a mistake.
- Even if you're wrong, it doesn't matter.
- It does for me because then I start to doubt my abilities. It's a big deal for me.
- For us, too. But making mistakes is human.
- Not for me, because if I do something... it has to be correct.
- If you don't do anything, you can't make mistakes.
- There are those things. I know I have to do it because otherwise, you'll still be here tomorrow night, gosh. And there's me thinking I was the stubborn one...

The interrogators spread the five photocopies around the microphone on the table. X1 can hardly look any other way now.

- I doubt myself.
- Do you doubt yourself?
- Yes.
- Are you unsure about one of these pictures?
- If I'm not sure, I don't want to say. I'm so obstinate.
- Yes.
- It's annoying, but hey, what happened to the days when you thought I was easy?
- Yes, you have never been easy, but we know that difficult works for you, too.
- Of course, it's the easiest thing.
- No, it's not the easiest thing.
- And if I'm not sure?
- Then we understand.
- Well, I can tell you, please understand that.
- So, if you're honest... did you recognise her?
- I have doubts about myself, yes.
- You doubt yourself; why?
- Because I can see her in different circumstances.
- Yes, then you're allowed to question yourself.
- And... then I saw... I wouldn't see that little girl in the picture if you know what I mean.
- Yes, I understand you because there are no pictures of her in the circumstances you knew her under before. Is that it?
- (Nods, yes.)

- In your current state of doubt... can you read the number on the photo where you have doubts? You should be able to do that, right?
- You know the picture... which you doubt?
- Yes, I do.
- Without looking... can you put your finger on it?
- Yes, I can.
- Make one last effort to do it.
- P10...
- What did you say?
- P10! Did you not hear it? Can I go home now?
- Yes, you may always go home.
- Yea sure...
- We will conclude the interrogation.

It is November 14, 1996, just before 7 am. The photograph with the code P10 shows the face of a girl named Anik D., today 37 years old, happily married and alive & kicking. 'To objectively assess what happened there that morning, you should watch the videotape of that interrogation,' Regina Louf says later. 'It was seven in the morning. I was utterly exhausted and wanted to go home. If I had pointed out Kristien, I would have gone back, and then De Baets would certainly have continued for another three hours. In my stubbornness, I wanted them to feel they had to give me more time. I console myself with one thought: if De Baets' successors had not taken this as an opportunity to question everything, I am sure they would have found something else.'*10

NOTES:

1. Bourlet utters his historic words on August 23, 1996, during a live RTBF broadcast devoted to the Dutroux case. His statement comes after children's rights activist Marie-France Botte asks aloud in the studio whether one will have the courage to prosecute all the people identified in pornographic videos found at Dutroux's house. 'I will certainly do that,' says Bourlet, to which Botte replies, 'They always say that.' Bourlet is referring to the stocks-dossier that was removed from his Public Prosecutor's Office at the time as part of the Cools dossier.
2. The two national magistrates stay until well after midnight, Michot leaving a little later. Bourlet stays until about four in the morning. The two magistrates were featured in the news for another reason in 1998.

Duinslaeger became head of the cabinet for Minister of Justice Stefaan De Clerck and would remain there under his successor, Tony Van Parijs. Shortly after De Clerck's resignation, Vandoren was 'tipped' as the new Justice Minister. In the same period, public opinion was inundated by reports that the interrogations of X1 were being 'manipulated'. Neither of them feels compelled to make a public statement about this claim.

3. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, 13 November 1996, PV 116.990. Emmanuel Vande Broek translated the interrogation into French on 16 January 1997, PV 100.132. The authors partly converted the verbatim dialogues back from French to Dutch. Some passages are authentic.
4. Marc Dutroux did indeed own two German shepherds in 1983, as the Judicial Police of Arlon found out on December 4, 1996 (PV 2.867). Information, BOB Brussels, December 11, 1996, PV 118.279.
5. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, Marche-en-Famenne BOB, December 2, 1996, PV 100.351.
6. X1 refers here to the killing of animals.
7. BOB officer Aimé Bille identifies the two deceased girls from Ghent almost simultaneously with the observation that the murder of Christine Van Hees was never solved. BOB Brussels, 28 October 1996, PV's 116.256 and 116.257.
8. BOB Brussels, 29 October 1996, PV 117.545.
9. 'Hope' is one of Regina Louf's alter personas. The appointed psychiatrists were later criticised for being too much in favour of the school of thought which links dissociative disorders to a history of sexual abuse. During the hearings of October 25th, November 13th, and 18th, the psychiatrists were Kristien Stiers and Dirk Vanmarcke. Because Vanmarcke indirectly reveals elements of the investigation in the weekly Knack shortly afterwards, he is replaced by Chantal Van Elsuwege.
10. Interview with Regina Louf, June 29th, 1998.

5. 'The only problem for me is time.'

Witness X1, 18th November 1996

- Is it possible that you are mistaken about the facts?
- (What do you mean) mistaken about the facts?
- Yes, is it possible you are mixing up facts?
- No, not mixing, but...

- So, we may assume that if you describe a fact, it is a fact. So that you don't...
- Yes, that's not the problem. The only problem with me is time. It's a, uh... That's as abstract as a three-year-old having to explain what a cube is ... Time is not my strong suit, but when I tell a fact, it's, uh, yes...
- Have you ever seen Kristien's parents?
- At least... Maybe I have, but I didn't know they were Kristien's parents.
- The day you came to Brussels... ...during the previous interview you stated: 'My mother was taking me to a car park'.
- Yes.
- 'Somewhere, and that's where Tony came to pick me up'.
- Can we take it from there? What happens then, in logical order? Was it a school day?
- A school day, with all those days of truancy... I don't know. I have no idea (...).
- Does he tell you anything?
- Very little. He tells me what to do, yes. That's all.
- What does he ask you?
- To satisfy him orally.
- Is that how he speaks to you, Tony?
- Hmm, no...
- What words does he use then?
- Whether I want to suck him off.
- Does he ask if you want to?
- No, no.
- No, use the words he uses.
- Geez, it's not easy to imitate him. Anyway, how did he say it exactly... Mostly, stereotypically, it was something along the lines of: 'Come pussycat, unzip my trousers, suck me off.' Something like that.
- And then you drive? Well, while he is driving?
- He drives, yes, not me. I do something else. After he finishes, I just lay my head on his lap. I don't care where I'm being taken. I think we were about there when I straightened up. But then I got nauseous. Getting into the car, getting on with it, all that stuff. It makes you sick. And then, uh, I just laid my head on his shoulder. I think we were the last ones there (...).
- Are you now looking at the road?
- Yes.
- Is there anything that has stayed with you from that road?
- Nothing in particular. I've seen so many roads (...).
- Was it in the city?
- No, not really. But it wasn't the countryside either. Well, yes, how... how can I describe it? I don't know. I will try to explain

where we finally arrived. It was a gravel road; it wasn't paved, but it wasn't an earth road either. I guess it was, uh, narrow, and there were trees on the left-hand side. And at the end, there was the driveway of this house, which was sloped—something like that.

- Can you draw it?
- Maybe I can. I'm going to go to the toilet first. My kidneys...*1

It is Saturday, November 18th, 1996, 8:58 pm. A slight resentment is palpable whenever De Baets and Hupez ask a question. For some reason, X1 is determined to keep every statement as vague as possible. This interrogation will be exclusively about Kristien. The detectives are troubled by the date of the facts. A cautious attempt by De Baets to arrange the events chronologically has gone awry at the start of the interrogation. On several occasions, he had asked her when she first met Kristien. 'I think I saw her at fairly irregular intervals,' she stammered. 'I think the first time was a little over a year before that, for sure. And then a couple of months in between, thereabouts.'*2 The life story of X1 has only one central surefire date stamp: when she was ten years old and moved from Knokke to Ghent. Christine Van Hees, however, was murdered in 1984, at least four years later. De Baets keeps trying and helps X1 a little.

- Can you place that date with your age at that time, by the school you attended, or by academy year or so?
- I am trying to remember. I was still relatively young, and I had already left Knokke. I think shortly after Knokke, for sure. I don't precisely recall.
- Probably longer, uh... after Knokke?
- I don't really know anymore. It could be. When? Well..
- Because, in fact, at the beginning of the interrogation, you stated that you already belonged to Tony and that she belonged to Nihoul.
- She's with Nihoul. I'm not really with Tony yet. I already knew him, but it hadn't started in full yet. That period...
- Please give it a good thought.
- I don't really know anymore, gosh. It renders me, err...
- Do you have any points of comparison?
- I'm actually having severe problems with ages; they are pretty vague to me. At what age I was, links to the people I was with. It's complicated. I don't know anymore.

Some of his colleagues think Adjutant De Baets has a problem when they read the written results of this interrogation a few days later. In front of prosecutor Michel Bourlet, national magistrate André Vandoren, and Colonel Henri Berkmoes of the CBO, he had already more or less presented the testimonies of X1 as the whole of a set of provable facts. The investigators of the 3KOS who did work directly for Neufchâteau in those days- a minority- are already starting to hint at 'collective madness'. De Baets, they say, has already committed himself so much and has demanded and received so much logistical support that he can no longer afford to call X1's statements into question. This evening, X1 has mastered the art of coming up with deviant and meaningless answers like no other. Uh, uh, I don't know. I think so. It could be. She didn't see anything of the route she had taken. She couldn't say whether Kristien was older or younger than her. And when they arrived over there, they were 'not in the city, but not on the outskirts either'. After the sanitary stop, she continues to debate these answers unperturbed. They seem feeble attempts to regain some of her original credit. None of the investigators can predict that a mere half a day later, she will succeed in doing so in the most convincing manner.

X1 begins to draw. She has been asked to describe the place where the sex party started. What emerges from her increasingly voluminous sketches throughout the evening is a horse riding school. A doghouse with a Dobermann in it. A most charming country house, lit by small windows with red and white checkered curtains. A cowhide in front of the gently crackling fireplace in the small parlour and the bulging bookcase. The company evoked less idyllic atmospheres: Michel Nihoul, Annie Bouty, Marc Dutroux, Michèle Martin, Bernard Weinstein, an unknown, Tony and An's parents.*3 The first image X1 has of Kristien is a young girl sitting next to the fireplace reading a Suske and Wiske comic book.

When asked what time of year this happened, X1 says, ' Well, it wasn't too hot, but it hadn't rained in a while. It was so, so... I don't remember.'

- And, in fact, was that in Brussels, or did you drive through Brussels*4
- I don't know. Through Brussels?
- Yes.
- Through Brussels?

- Yes
- No, we didn't go through Brussels.
- Around Brussels?
- It's possible; I don't know.

X1 explains that, like Kristien, she is undressed and required to participate actively in the 'party' that the adults have kicked off. Pretty soon, she realises that this will be no ordinary evening. Things do not go well for her fellow sufferer. 'She is not spontaneous enough. Too nervous. She asks too many questions. (...) She was so embarrassed, too. I don't think she was used to working with a group.' It is An's thus far unidentified father who, as if agreed, gets up at a particular moment and pulls out some pieces of rope from a chest of drawers. He thrusts these pieces of string into X1's hands. The attendants look on. 'He puts them in my hand. Obviously... it is one of the games (...). And they, yes... they want to see what you will do with it. Well, this partly determined our fate. I went to Kristien; I put these in her hands. That was the easiest thing: to put the responsibility on her. And she immediately bounced the ball back.

- What did she do?
- Figuratively, then, she rebounded the ball. So she...
- Gave it back?
- Gave it back, yes. And that's the thing that was so important. That determines your fate.
- Would you like some coffee?
- No, thank you. That's right,... It's your destiny. It sounds banal; if you merely state it like so, it sounds dull, but...

Whilst drawing meticulously who is in what position, she describes a gang rape in which both girls are beaten incessantly with a broomstick. X1 relates that she is instructed to silence the girl somehow but doesn't manage to do so. This problem runs through her story as a central theme for the rest of the night. Whenever she brings up Kristien's cries for help, she emphasises how this only provokes more aggression in some adults.

Sometime during the evening, she hears a car horn just outside. Tony opens the door, and a little later, lawyer E. enters the country house. He sits down with the others, who have

now given their two sex slaves an hour or two of respite. X1 has joined Kristien in the corner of the salon. She describes the child's condition as totally exhausted and seemingly asleep. Lawyer E. comes up with an idea: a contest. The two girls are assigned the task of the fastest way to satisfy all the male participants of the party orally. The outcome, says X1, is already determined in advance, especially when she notices that her fellow sufferer does not even try to compete and receives a beating from the three participating adult women.

- Hmm, and that's why I... I went on strike. I quit.
- You didn't want to do it anymore?
- I didn't want to carry on. I'm quitting—what a way to prove myself again. I figured that if I stopped, nothing worse could happen to her. So they had to focus on me instead of her. That wasn't so much because I wanted to protect her; it was... She was seriously making my situation miserable. So the only thing to try was to help her. So, it wasn't out of charity. So I went on strike, and the result was that she took even more of a beating. She was also being punished for everything I did wrong (...). If you don't panic, you know: gosh... if you let them get on with it, if you let it happen to you, then you're out of here in no time, but if you panic, then... you can... well, you don't think about that anymore, about how long it might take. Then you get the full brunt of it.
- Kristien doesn't seem to know the system very well, does she?
- No, she doesn't.
- Can we assume that Kristien wasn't yet fully initiated?
- No, we can't.
- Or wasn't yet involved?
- No.
-for that long?
- Not in that area, anyway. And for the rest, I can't say. But she didn't know the system very well yet. I wonder if you understand what I'm having a hard time with—the fact that she was so ignorant.

When the investigators cross-referenced X1's statements with the original murder case in the old mushroom farm in Auderghem, it was revealed a few weeks later that Christine Van Hees must indeed have come into contact with a highly unusual milieu shortly before her death. But at the time of this evening's interview, her interrogators don't know that yet. They let her talk. Suddenly, they hear her mention the word

'snake'. Kristien must once have told Michel Nihoul that she was terrified of them. That statement, says X1, was tested for accuracy during that evening's party.

- Where did that snake suddenly come from?
- Where did it come from? Bouty went to get it. It was probably in the car. At first, I don't know if you know this, but the creature was very calm. However, once the snake started to get hot, it began to move. I think that's why I have a horror of snakes. Then that thing started moving, too. Then she went crazy, and my task was to shut her up.

X1 reveals that she, too, must undergo the snake treatment. She is tied up on a table. The animal crawls over her. At that point, her story grinds to a sudden halt. It is the first psychological showdown with De Baets ('You must tell us!'). It is already after midnight, and some insinuating remarks from X1 suggest that she has yet to begin to tell the whole story. The adults in the villa are getting dressed. X1 and Kristien get a black satin bag pulled over their heads and are taken away in the nude.

- They go home.
- What?
- That they are going home.
- Who?
- Uh, the people who were there.
- Do you sense you're being taken outside?
- (nods yes)
- What do you notice?
- The cold, I was so tired.

The whole party, X1 tells us, divides into three cars. Kristien is in a different car than her. She has no idea how long they are driving. After some urging, De Baets gets an answer untypically precise for X1: 'I think about twenty minutes. On the way, X1 says, there is near silence.'

- Where do we arrive? I don't know because I still can't see anything. What I do know is that if you get out with girls like that, you're probably not parked on the street. When we get out of the car, I can hear Kristien softly. I don't know what she's doing, but...
- Do you hear her?

- (nods yes)
- Is she crying?
- Yes, she murmurs something, barely audible (...).
- Are you on your bare feet?
- (nods yes)
- When you leave the car, do you feel anything under your feet?
- Uh...
- Do you feel your feet?*5
- What are you walking on? Do you feel it?
- It's, it's sharp.
- What do you think it is?
- Little pebbles or something.
- Pebbles?
- Hmhm.
- Or paving?
- Something like that.
- So it's not pavement. It's not flat. Are you in pain?
- A little, but I'm so used to walking barefoot that it doesn't bother me too much...

For De Baets and Hupez, it is near-certain that X1 is approaching the old mushroom farm in this scene. There was no shortage of stone dust and debris at the beginning of 1984; it later turns out. Yet, at this point, they still have their doubts. Many months later, De Baets would admit that he could no longer make sense of the scene at that point of the interview. In his thesis, Christine Van Hees was murdered in a cellar. Up to this point, X1 has only mentioned a house.*6

- Did you enter someplace?
- Yeah, um... I can't do it.
- Are you coming in... entering any specific place?
- I try so hard, but...pff.
- Yes, you're coming in somewhere.
- It smells like... not sure what it smells like... Kristien finds me and comes to stand close to me.
- So you are inside somewhere. Is that it? Or are you still outside
- (X1 nods no)
- Are you inside? All of you, everyone?
- Oh, jeez. I don't know... I can't see anything.
- But it smells different from the outside?
- Ah yes.
- So outside, it smells fresh there?
- Hmhm (...).
- Do you pick up any sounds? Do you hear anything in particular?

- No, it's, it's... very strange. Not something when you come to some unfamiliar place you don't know where. Then you try to find out where you are. You're looking for familiar things, which scares me because I can't make anything out.
- Is this your first time there?
- Uh...
- So you don't know the place, but you can smell it?
- Yes.
- Don't you know those smells?
- I really don't know where I am; I don't know.
- Was there anyone in there before you got there? Was there someone there?
- Yes, but I don't know who. About two people, I think.
- But not from that group?
- No.
- So you guys get there, and then two individuals are already in the place?
- Yes.
- Do they speak to each other, those who are there now? To those who come in? Do you hear who is talking to whom? Who is doing the talking?
- Gosh.
- Who knows the people who are already inside?
- Nihoul speaks to them (...). He asks if everything is ready. I don't know what that means for Kristien, but when he asks if everything is prepared, I get overwhelmed with fright... They are getting everything ready. It's as if they want to operate (...). I am so afraid to go back (to those memories).
- Don't be afraid; we are with you. It doesn't exist anymore; where you've been, it's gone. Do you understand?
- Hmhm.
- It no longer exists; we need you to tell us where it was.

She and Kristien, she says, still carry those hoods over their heads. After they got out of the car, they moved forward about ten paces before getting somewhere 'inside'. She hears Kristien receiving a beating. One of the women pushes both girls into a corner somewhere in the house where they are staying. There, she, like Kristien, gets some sign painted on her body. Once that is done, she is taken back to the men.

- Still in the same place?
- No, I'm telling you... but I don't know where. I've lost my bearings there.

- Yeah, that's what they want, right? That you lose your bearings? Do they make you walk anywhere?
- Hmhm.
- Do you have to go up some stairs or down some?
- I'm tripping over something. It's not stairs. I really don't know.
- Do you feel like you're stepping forward? It's not stairs. Is it something else?
- 'Over a rise, well... it's not stairs.*7 I'm stumbling across the obstacle because she hasn't pushed me forward. And quite soon after, someone picks me up.

Once inside the house, the hoods are removed from their heads. Tony thrusts a knife into her vagina and asks her if she loves him. Kristien, too, is on the receiving end of some rough treatment. 'Believe it or not, says X1, the only person I got angry at was her'. Her fellow sufferer has completely lost composure and is in a state of utter terror. This makes the course of the evening unpredictable.*8 Kristien is once more tied to a table.

- Can you stop for a few seconds? Can you look around you? Do you see anything? Forget for a moment all the people there and look around you. Can you visualise the room?
- (nods yes)
- Can you describe it, or can you... Do you see things you can identify?
- Objects? - Pff.
- Are you alright?
- It's like, err, yeah...
- What's up?
- There are some artefacts on the ground.
- There are artefacts on the ground. Do you know what they are?
- Yes and no. There is a green can; there is rope.
- What is there?
- Rope.
- Rope. What else can you see?
- I don't see anything else.
- The green can is a plastic one or iron? Did you see it?
- No, it's like... it's like, gosh, it's like it's from the army, that colour.
- Khaki? Can you see the ground now?
- (nods yes)
- Is there a floor there or something?
- I don't know.
- What do you see?

- I have... I can't... I can't see.
- Can't you see? Is it dark in there?
- No, it's not that dark. There were lit candles and stuff. I just can't get her out of my head.

De Baets and Hupez hardly pay any attention to what X1 says here. They cannot know that what X1 has just described corresponds precisely to what the Brussels Judiciary Police found in the house next to the old mushroom farm on the night of February 13-14th, 1984. They are now more interested in the two unknown men. In his early thirties, one speaks with an unmistakable Antwerp accent, carries a camera, and wears a gold chain with a pendant showing his star sign: Leo. He wears a T-shirt without sleeves, making his numerous tattoos visible. She has seen the man before and knows he also has a large tattoo of an osprey on his chest. She does not know the name of the second person either. She estimates him to be in his late thirties. He wears blond hair in a ponytail and stands out because of his stature. They called him "De Lange". He is also from Antwerp but speaks perfect French. X1 says she has known him since she was a student. They are friends of Tony.

That morning, she also provides a detailed description of 'the father of An', about whom X1 will later report that she is unsure whether he is the father or a lover. She estimates him to be forty-five years old. He has short, greying hair, is not so tall and speaks French. Finally, there is an illustrious unknown. She estimates him to be in his early fifties. He has light grey hair, wears glasses, has no beard and is not so tall. He, too, speaks French.

- Are we going to continue to focus on Kristien? What are they doing with Kristien?
- Pff... they put her on the table (...).
- Is this an ordinary table?
- An ordinary one?
- Yes. Is that a table like there was one in that first house?
- Unwieldy,
- What?
- Rougher
- Ponderous?
- Much rougher.

X1 says Kristien has already tried to get off the table. When she fails to do so, she screams for help.

- It really infuriates me. I run to Tony.
- Do you run to Tony?
- I just fly at him. I fly at him. I hold him; I shake him. As far as that was possible
- How does he react?
- I ask him to stop, stop, stop, please stop....
- How does he react?
- He doesn't react; he smiles a little. Until I'm being grabbed and, uh...
- Who grabs you?
- The one with the tattoos.
- And what does he do to you?
- He pushes me to my knees. He rapes me. Once he gets at it, they tied up Kristien by now, but I didn't register them tying her up while I was being raped. Like in a type of bunny snare... she keeps screaming. I see them approaching with an axe.
- With an...?
- With some axe, something like that. I can't do it again. Gosh, they come at her with that axe, and they want to plant this in her vagina, not in a gentle way... I tried to...with all the power that I had left.... they kicked me in the back. I turned around; I don't think I've ever stood up... so quickly as that. I put my... I put my hand in front of it. It was in my hand.
- So you avoid this kind of knife*9 going into her vagina?
- You can still see the point (shows a scar on her right hand).
- What happens then? Do you see the cord with which Kristien is tied up?
- (nods yes)... How on earth am I supposed to describe a cord pff...
- But is it a cord? Look closely.
- I'll tell you what I sense at that moment. I can hear her constant screaming. I'm in a hell of a lot of pain. How am I able to see, do you suppose? How sharp are my observational powers at that moment do you think? All I care about is doing something about it. That's what interests me. Now I can say that icily calm... (...)
- So, what do they do?
- They go on; they just carry on.
- Who's doing what?
- Oh... what do they do... They turn her on her stomach. They rape her again.

A new day has begun. De Baets and Hupez are still determining what to make of the result so far. More than eight

hours of interrogations have, once again, provided them with a compelling testimony because of its emotionality. Still, there has not been any mention of anything like a cellar up to that point. Could it be that she is talking about a different murder, which took place according to a similar pattern? It's possible. However, shortly after the interrogation continued at 5:45 a.m., X1 began to dispel doubts further.

- Can we possibly move on?
- I'm going to try to describe the house. Before I get back into the swing of things here... It's a house that reminds us of... not far from my parents' house; many places were empty. And there would often be some kids going there to play and stuff. It smells that way.
- Musty?
- Yeah, it has been a long time since it has been heated.
- Hmm, rank, as they say.*10 When you get there, you see that house?
- (nods no)
- In front of you?
- No.
- Oh no, it's like, you can't see it.
- You can't see it; I can't see it (...).
- You feel... and then Bouty takes you somewhere. You say, apparently...
- In a room, well, where we end up staying. Uh...
- And there, you say, you noticed a jerrycan, a water bottle, green, khaki green... There are ropes on the floor. Do you see any windows? Do you see any doors?
- No, it's dark. Well, dark, not pitch black, but it's, uh... there's just the light of the candles. It's like a basement. A lot of shadows, yeah, just things that...
- Are you leaving that house yet?
- Afterwards.
- Before leaving?
- (nods yes)
- If, uh... so you go in, and typically, it's like a house. You have that feeling, and afterwards, you get to somewhere else. Is it that big... Because you say: you walk ten steps, and then they pick you up, and you immediately enter some lower area?
- I suppose we went through a corridor or something, sure... I've only been there once.
- Okay sure
- That's hard to, uh... so big, pff; it's undoubtedly bigger than my house(...).

- Bouty holds you close to her, you say.
- Yes.
- And you have to... so she pushes you forward, and then you trip over something...?
- Yes, I trip over... I won't say a staircase. It's, uh, a... a... a step like that.
- And does it go up?
- It does.
- A step up?
- Ah, yes, because I'm tripping over it.
- Yes, but is it like a low wall or something like that?
- If I could have seen it...
- Yes, but no... you stumble up there, and then you take, yes...
- It feels... I already said it. It feels... it's stone. It feels like bluestone or so. I could basically say that (...).
- You can see the second space if you forget about the first area. Do you think you can see the second area because, at some point, they remove the hood from your head?
- (nods yes)
- And do you then see...
- It is wider. Wait a minute. If I compare it to my living room, it is wider. My living room is about three and a half meters. Because my living room is relatively narrow, I can tell this room is wider.
- Now, do you see any windows in that room?
- Wait, I'm not sure, but here... the space is like, those walls are without windows. There is no door. Here is the place where I enter.
- A... a place inside a place?
- No, you just enter if you look at it that way. You come in like here, with a doorway, but no actual door if you go in. You enter a fairly square space. Here we go again... my floor plans (draws a floor plan). I think the area is kind of like this(...).
- Is it there, that little wall you're tripping over?
- No, that wall, that walkway, it runs about here. And when I come out of that space, I go over there. Then I stumble over here, and I arrive at the...
- The space?
- In the space. There's a floor. It feels too cold to be a... to be a wooden floor. This is where the jerrycan is. There were some more bags of supplies. I'm trying to figure out where the bags are. There is a plastic bag of, uh... I can't quite read it, but I think it's from the Gamma shop or something.

It is the first interview in which X1 provides such a significant amount of detail. De Baets and Hupez do not yet know what

explosive findings her drawings will lead to later. They are presently working on pure intuition, which only tells them that they are facing a person who is doing her utmost to describe a place as honestly and correctly as possible. A year and a half later, amid the X1 controversy, De Baets will state the same thing a hundredfold: 'I wish I had kept a copy of the interrogation videotapes for myself. I would be very much inclined to play these to all those critics. There was nothing fake about her testimony. This was real.' The interrogation continues.

- Are there any other objects lying or standing there that you can observe? It appears to you like something that is not heated, which seems empty and stale. Do you see any other objects lying there? You say you recognise a bag there, a plastic bag from Gamma, you think. You see that Jerry can...
- In better days, that place would have been some kitchen. Uh, or a storeroom. I don't know; it was too big for that. My grandmother still had one of those in an annexe to her kitchen. There were about three hooks in the ceiling... where you could hook bacon and stuff.*11
- Yes, there too?
- (nods yes) In the ceiling on the right. Right in the corner.
- Can you draw them?
- This is the spot where these hooks were fixed... We'd better buy a new marker to add them here... I think there was a door here from which the stairs emanated.
- Did you come down the stairs?
- No, I didn't.
- Isn't there a door or something where you can see the stairs?
- When we were first there, one of them opened the door to have a look. That's when I saw part of the stairs.
- What does it look like?
- Hm?
- What does it look like, that staircase you see?
- An old set of stairs.
- An old staircase going down to the basement?
- No, I think it goes up. The one that goes up to the top floor, probably?
- Those walls or the ceiling... If you see those hooks, can you see the ceiling too?
- It's, uh... painted ceilings, but they're, uh... they're square tiles with trellises. They're not even anymore; most of them have been warped by the moisture. There are about a dozen cardboard boxes. Other than that, there isn't anything special (...).

Everything looks so different with that kind of light. I know they were somewhat pale walls. I can't say much more than that (...).

- In your statement last week, you said they carried you out via a staircase; do you recall that?
- Yes, but I'm wondering now whether that was somewhere, anyhow... if we went out somewhere else or whether we came in. And where that was, well... I mean, in such a short time... I know there was a staircase across which he carried me.

The old mushroom farm of Auderghem and the adjacent properties were demolished in 1989. X1 was twenty years old and lived in Ghent. It is well past six am, and De Baets returns to Kristien's fate rather than leave it at that. X1's attitude changes again. Long silences fall between questions and answers. X1 explains how the girl is allowed to escape for a moment -to raise false hopes- and then is tied up again on the table. Then, X1 gets a knife thrust into her hands with the instruction to kill her friend. She wants to run away.

- Are you sure that you cut her?
- If you want to know if she was already dead... no, she wasn't dead yet.
- Are you sure you made a cutting move?
- Yes, only not by... I didn't go on... I couldn't.
- Is Kristien still yelling?
- No, no, she isn't.
- What happens then?
- I'm so... pff, very difficult, uh... They finally allowed me to leave. They put me in a corner somewhere, just with my hands above my head (...). Someone, someone is calling my name (...).
- Whose voice is it calling out to you?
- Tony and I looked at him. I was the last one called, but that's not it.
- Then what is it?
- She's taking some stuff.
- What stuff? That they used in the first house?
- It's with Kristien...
- What?
- The stuff they used on Kristien. That's what it is.
- What kind of stuff is that?
- The stuff they use to light the fire.
- What?
- What they use to light a fire with.
- A lighter?
- No.

- A liquid?
- Yes.
- Does she pour that over you?
- (nods yes) And over her.
- Yes, and who is pouring that stuff over you and her?
- Oh, what's his name again.
- What makes you think Kristien is not dead yet?
- I heard her scream. You can guess the rest.
- Who's lighting the fire?
- Tony...Tony is holding me. He lifts me, and he says to her, 'Bouty if you don't stop bullying her now.' (long silence) I can't describe it... I can't explain it; I cannot express it in words... I can't describe it (...).
- Does she have to leave you alone? And is she okay with that?
- Yes, more or less. She's not... exactly elated about it... but anyway. She's letting me go anyway.
- Are they letting you go? They let you go where?
- Then they set her on fire. They let me go; they take me along.
- Who lit the fire?
- She did.
- Bouty?
- She was taunting me with matches.
- Was she taunting you with matches?
- Yes.
- To set you on fire? And eventually, they set Kristien on fire?
- Hmhm.
- Are you still present when they do?
- Tony has picked me up, and I'm looking over his shoulder.
- Where's Tony taking you?
- To the car.
- While you're naked?
- In the trunk is my sports bag, which contains some of my clothes.
- If they, if they... set Kristien on fire, is she dead at that point?
- (X1 nods no)
- If they pour that liquid on her, is she still lying on her side?
- I don't know where she lies. I don't know.
- On the floor? Is she still lying on the table?
- (nods no)
- Is she lying on the floor?
- (nods yes)

Outside, the sound of the morning rush hour picking up momentum is audible, but no one in the interrogation room heeds it.

- If you are at that place, did anyone care for Kristien at any point?
- (nods yes)
- By whom?
- By An's mother.
- By?
- By An's mother.
- What does the mother of An do?
- Giving her tampons (...).
- Why?
- Because she's bleeding, it's to stem the blood.
- Yes. But why does An's mother take care of Kristien?
- Don't you know that it gives people hope that you can tease people like that? You provide them with something only to take it away again. You make them crazy. That is why.

Questions are raised about Kristien, Marc Dutroux's role, and the house and adjoining rooms. Still, the answers become shorter, gloomier, and more dispirited, especially when De Baets brings out the photos again. It is the same set of five photographs with the same code. X1 pulled out the wrong picture last time. X1 says she did that on purpose because she had enough of the interrogation then. It appears this time is no different.

- May we ask you to take another look at last week's photos with a final effort?
- Oh... oh. Not that I saw them, but...
- What?
- Not that I've seen them, but...
- Last week she was in the photos you saw... Was Kristien in the pictures?
- I remember, anyway... I had seen her anyway when I searched Clo, and she was not among them either... I don't know anymore. I don't want to see them again, please don't do it to me again (...).^{*12}
- Shall we stop?
- (nods yes).

It is twenty past seven. This is the most prolonged interrogation X1 has ever had to endure. During what should be a short goodbye, a bit of catching up, X1 suddenly drops the word 'cellar'. Perhaps she did not sufficiently emphasise that part of the events occurred there. De Baets and Hupez look at each other, startled. One interrogator remembers that during

the recorded interrogation, she briefly mentioned a cellar on a side note; the other one is unsure.*13 While they are consulting with each other, X1 is in an adjacent room, humming a tune. She does this regularly during breaks. 'We will let her sing one more song,' says De Baets. At a quarter past eight, the camera turns again.

- Who's suggesting to go down there? How come all of a sudden, you guys are down there?
- At some point, they chase Kristien.
- Are they... chasing Kristien?
- Chasing. I don't really know who decided that... They're chasing her down.
- Do you remember how you got down there? In your last statement, you said you saw a staircase leading upwards.
- The stairs go upwards.
- Is there another place where the stairs go down, or do you have to go outside, or...?
- Right.
- Wait, here's the floor plan (hands her the drawing).
- Here's a staircase. (points to the stairs on the drawing). And that leads, wait, hey, does that go down.... it leads to the space down there.
- From what place?
- That one is going down like that.
- From that place?
- Yes. There's a kind of wooden wall with half wood and half glass, which is opaque glass (shows the wall on the drawing). I will persist in recalling this because I don't want to leave her alone.
- Who unties her?
- Nihoul turns her loose. She does not move at all at first.
- And who helps her get off that table?
- Me. Initially, she was very unstable on her feet because she had been in the same position too long. Then she goes down the stairs (long silence)... They follow her downstairs, and I don't want to leave her alone (...).
- X1 explains that she ends up in a larger area with a stone floor.
- Bouty is carrying something.
- What is she carrying?
- It's, err...some metal bar.
- Can you describe it or sketch it? Can you see her?
- (nods yes)
- Can you describe or draw it?
- It is hollow, about 30 centimetres long. And E and Nihoul grab me and put me on the floor. Bouty, always her...

- Bouty?
- I can't do it...
- Is Bouty doing something with that metal bar?
- I can't get myself to say it...

Hesitantly, X1 reveals that Bouty is holding the bar over a candle and then pushes it into her vagina. At that moment, Kristien stands beside her, propped up against the wall.

- What's happening? Are they hurting you more? Does she have any other implements with her?
- (nods yes)
- Were they found there on the spot, or did she bring them?
- It's not so clear to me whether she brought them.
- Do you see any other things that you can describe?
- (nods no) I don't know if I can describe them.
- Can you draw them?
- (nods no)
- Do you want to try it?
- She's brought scissors...
- Apart from the scissors, what else has she got? Can you tell what it looks like if you can't verbalise it?
- I cannot; I cannot.
- But you see them, don't you? You know what they look like, don't you? Then you can draw them, can't you? It may be easier to draw them than to describe them.

X1 has tucked her legs and arms into a ball in her chair. Now and then, she hides her head in her arms, only occasionally answering a question. She is by no means susceptible to the interrogators' attempts to put her back on track.

- Do things happen that leave marks on the floor or Kristien?
- (nods yes)
- On both?
- (nods yes)
- Can you tell us anything about it?
- They're burning us.
- What?
- They're burning us.
- Are they burning you?
- Yes, they are.
- With candles?
- And cigarettes.

A terrible sequence of events ensues that causes X1 to freeze up completely. At one point, De Baets tries to bring her out of an emotional trance by having her first name roar through the interrogation room - entirely against the rules: 'Regina!'

- Is she not tied up anymore?
- (nods no) No, because they let her loose quite often... so she can scramble away, and then they must take her back.
- Don't they eventually tie her up again?
- They do, eventually (...)
- Do they make you watch?
- (nods yes)
- Does Tony hold you?
- (nods yes)
- And what does An's father do?
- He ties her up (...). That's why she has to be tied with her hands and feet. They beat her on her back.
- Are you observing the proceedings? Do they make you look at it? What do they use to tie her up?
- I don't know. I don't dwell on that (...).
- Is everyone going back downstairs afterwards?
- But I don't want to!
- Have they done anything to Kristien?
- I think she's almost dead.
- Do you think so?
- I think she's nearly dead.
- Has anything changed about the way she was when you left her?
- Anything changed?
- What?
- I don't know about any change...
- Is she still tied up?
- (nods yes)
- Still in the way An's father did?
- (nods yes)
- Do they take her upstairs afterwards?
- (nods yes)
- Who carries her?
- I don't know who holds her anymore. I want to get out. I want to go.
- Will anything happen to Kristien upstairs?
- Oh yes ...until she dies.
- A moment ago, you said she was still alive when they set fire to her.
- Yes, I did. They go upstairs until she dies, and then it continues with the liquid.

The morning light shines through the windows. De Baets and Hupez are not yet satisfied. She discussed one more small detail earlier and did not want to go into further detail.

- Are there any body parts injured badly by Nihoul?
- (nods no)
- No? By someone else? Where?
- I can't.
- But please say which body parts.
- Her entire back.
- What?
- Stop the pain!
- Is something being done to her arms or her hands? By whom?
- By... oh, by the lawyer.
- E.? And what is he doing? What does E. do?
- I can't, no, I can't.
- Make one last effort. You're not going to spare him, are you?
- Uh...
- What's he doing to Kristien? What does he do?
- He's...
- What is he doing? Get someone to help you.
- He's piercing her hands.
- He does what?
- He's drilling into her hands.
- He's drilling into her hands, her arms too? Can you tell what with?
- No, I don't.
- Can you observe him doing it? Do you see him? Do you see him doing it?
- Hm.
- But what does he do?
- No, I don't want to.
- What does E. do to make her arms stick out?
- I don't want to. I can't anymore.
- Is he busy? Is he hitting with something?
- (nods yes)
- Can you see what he is holding in his hand? What does he have in his hand?
- I don't want to; he's holding an axe.
- Is he holding an axe? A chisel?
- No, he's not.
- An axe? What about the other hand? What is he holding in his other hand?
- I don't want to; I don't want to.

- Tell me what he is holding in his other hand. What does he have in his other hand?
- No, he doesn't.
- You can see it, and you know it.
- I don't want to.
- You see it, you know it.
- No, you don't.
- You see, and you know. Tell us.
- But I can't.
- Yes, you can. You know what he is holding in his hand. He can't pierce that arm with just the axe. So what does he hold in the other hand? Tell me what he has in his other hand.
- He has that metal bar in his other hand.
- The bar that Bouty heated first? Is that the one?
- Yes, that's the one.
- And he punches it through her arm?
- Hmhm. (long silence)
- Are you coming back to us? Are you with us?
- I'm already here (...).
- Are we going to finish up for today?
- (nods yes)
- We will conclude the interrogation on the nineteenth of November ninety-six, at five minutes to ten.

NOTES:

1. Interrogation X1, 18 November 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 116.991. The passages shown come from the integral Dutch transcription of the video recording.
2. In the French translation of the interrogation of X1, there is a whopper of a translation error. Whereas X1 clearly says that she saw Kristien 'just under a year' earlier for the first time, the translators make it: "C'était quelques ans plus tôt" (several years earlier). When X1's statements are later checked against the old Van Hees file, the assertion that the Brussels girl had been in a prostitution network for 'some years' is taken as proof

that X1 is talking nonsense-especially in the eyes of the victim's parents.

3. In earlier interrogations, X1 described An D. as a girl entrusted to a network by her parents, just like her.
4. During the previous interrogation, X1 had already situated the events in Brussels.
5. In French, this is translated as 'vos petits pieds' (your little feet), which incorrectly gives the dialogue an almost erotic undertone. This kind of detail will affect the perception of certain French-speaking detectives and magistrates.
6. Two weeks later, when they look at the old court file, the detectives discover that some of the facts occurred in a house next to the old mushroom farm.
7. The interrogators don't know it then, but in the eyes of one of the former residents, this one little sentence contains incontrovertible proof that X1 had been in the house next to the old mushroom farm.
8. The interrogation is interrupted from 2:10 to 3:00 in the morning.
9. Several explanations exist for the unnoticed transformation of an axe into a knife. According to De Baets' opponents, he deliberately 'adjusted' the testimony here. Others think of a slip of the tongue due to fatigue - it is by now almost five o'clock in the morning. In a third explanation, X1 says that "bijl" in the East Flemish dialect is a description that can also apply to a knife. In any case, this is not a translation error, as some have suggested.
10. 'Wak' is an East Flemish dialect and means moist.
11. The French translation of the investigation mentions: 'Il y avait des crochets dans le plafond, deux, trois...'. X1 does, in fact, speak of 'three' meat hooks. The great importance of this will only become apparent later.
12. Anyone wanting to delve into the X1 file should read X1's answer twenty times. It is perhaps the most crucial sentence in the whole interrogation, as will become clear later. Those who read and re-read will notice that with 'they', X1 does not refer to Kristien's photo specifically but to the whole set of pictures. After all, she says very clearly about this

set of photographs: '...she is not among them either.'
Reading X1's words correctly seems futile, but it will take on immense importance later in the investigation.

13. Indeed,
X1 did say somewhere in the interrogation, 'That reminds me a bit of a basement.' As for the conversations during the breaks, it is essential to know that they were also recorded.

6. 'I've had a miserable Christmas and a sad New Year.'

Letter from Christine Van Hees to Pascal Lamarque,
January 1984

We will never know who alerted the emergency services. A police officer recalled that the emergency call came from a car

phone which only wealthy people tended to own in the eighties. Techniques to trace the origin of the call do not yet exist. It is Monday, February 13th 1984. At 8:47 pm, the fire department near the campus of Brussels University receives a report of smoke billowing from an abandoned house on the corner of the Strategiestraat and the Triomflaan. When the fire department arrives one minute later, 'old Jef' is already present. Jef lives in the neighbourhood, knows the place like no other and explains that this used to be a mushroom farm. Amid the flashing lights and generator noise, someone shouts about a secondary fire source in the cellars. While one team of firemen enters the deserted house on Jef's instructions, the other descends into the basement with flashlights.*1 Fireman Norbert Van den Berghe belongs to the second team, which quickly locates the cause and realises that the further fire danger need not be overestimated. He sees a smouldering pile of wood. 'Large crates,' Vanden Berghe remembers. 'Two meters by two. Since the fire had already largely burned out, we kicked it.'

He spots a charred human torso. Part of the head is burned off. Little or nothing remains of the hands and feet. 'It was a girl,' the fireman expresses with dismay even after all these years. She was lying on her stomach and was naked. Part of her back had burned away. Her hands and feet were tied together with iron wire, which extended and wound around her neck. Her legs were bent backwards. Terrible.' There is something that sticks in the lieutenant's mind: 'The murderer had driven a thick nail through the wrists of that girl.'*2 He estimates the nail to be eight inches long and three millimetres wide. 'I'm sure I saw several nails, I think about 4. I seem to remember that they had been hammered into the victim's body.'*3 His colleague Yvan Leurquin is unsure if this was indeed the case but admits to not having looked at the scene for too long - it was not something one could keep in view too long. 'I remember nails, but I think they came from the crates on the body.' The wood is pulverised, the metal is not. The way the body was tied up reminded him of a combat technique used by paratroopers: tying up the opponent so that he suffocates himself with every movement of his hands or feet.*4

The first policeman to arrive at the scene was Jacques Dekock, who later became the police commissioner of Auderghem. He

drew up the first official report in what, for a decade and a half after the event, would become one of the most talked-about cases in justice history in the capital: the crime of the mushroom farm. Jacques Dekock notes: 'The body lies on its stomach, and an iron wire is twisted several times around the neck and extended to the legs, which are folded backwards. Close to the body are several wooden boxes (...). Findings on the victim: a nail is driven into the left wrist, two small holes at the back of the neck, no more hands and no more feet, blood is coming from the head, the ends of the lower body parts are burned and torn (...),'*5

When the public prosecutor's office experts arrived on the scene that evening, they noticed that the firefighters had spoilt some of the crime scene artefacts. One of them-no doubt with the best intentions- moved the body several metres by aiming the fire hose at it. Apart from a charred body, what they found in the smouldering heap were a few personal belongings: jewellery and charred pieces of cloth from what might have been panties or a bra, a metal wire used to tie up the body, a burned lighter, two small metal plates with a hole at the end, a red scarf...*6 what has happened here over the past few hours is a mystery. The first impression is that the victim went with the killers of her own volition. Before the party descended into the basement, they appeared to have entered the abandoned house where the first fire was discovered. Detectives from the Brussels Judicial Police find a black leather vest with red stripes adorned with a picture of 'Blondie'. Further: a hammer, a crowbar, a 1 meter 80cm long cord, a receptacle with an amber-coloured liquid ('perhaps gasoline'), a torn poster,*7, the scorched remains of a ring binder, a bag filled with seven folders with some burned papers inside, a 50-centimetre long lath with iron wire and three nails attached to one of the ends, a small rusty bucket containing some burnt pieces of paper, an ashtray in brown stained glass and a cigarette butt with a white filter. *8 The detectives will examine the house and basement again on February 21, 1984, and again put some items into plastic bags. None of these pieces seems to bring them one step closer to the culprit(s).

'Cause of death unknown' was the preliminary conclusion of doctors Voordecker and Rillaert on the morning of February

14. Voordecker arrived at the scene that evening at ten after eleven and, with some difficulty, was able to determine the gender of the victim. A young woman. In his very first report, doctor Voordecker is cautious: "The first elements of appreciation after an external investigation (...) allow us to believe that the cause of death is related to suffocation or strangulation.*9 He indicates that the body suffered near-total burn damage, which renders any conclusions about the nature of her death uncertain. The law doctors will issue three autopsy reports in total, each with equally emphatic reservations about conclusions regarding the cause of death. In the second, most detailed report, it is said that it is impossible to say whether the victim died from burning, suffocation, strangulation, or other forms of abuse. What is certain is that she suffered each of these forms of torture. Strangulation is now considered less likely since no lesions were found on the cartilage in the neck. On the other hand, no traces of smoke are found in the lungs, which shows that the girl had died before being burned. At the end of their report, the doctors state: 'Concerning the genitals, and as far as the fire damage allows us, we can state that we have discovered no traces of traumatising injuries. The uterus is empty, and the mucous membrane is not in a period of menstruation. The cervix is that of a Nullipare.'*10 In a third report, the two doctors state that the victim was no longer a virgin, and her death is probably not caused by burning but by strangulation with the metal wire.*11 The law doctors couldn't come to a definitive conclusion.

The old mushroom farm had been abandoned since 1972. It has become an urban cancer in twelve years: cracked windows, rotten doors, and mouldy coteries. Only the house, where the former operators lived, is still more or less presentable. It was a two-story dwelling with a large room on the ground floor where there must once have been some industrial kitchen. A corridor and a garden path connect it to the large basement, which is rotten and mouldy. Walking around the place is highly discouraged. A few years after the murder, the ruins will be demolished to make way for social housing. The roof will be lifted off the basement, and the floor will be asphalted and turned into resident parking.

In the RTL television news, Pierre and Antoinette Van Hees hear about the gruesome discovery a few blocks away on Tuesday evening, February 14. They are struck with terror. Their daughter Christine, 16, had not come home the previous evening. The couple had recently opened a newspaper store along Diamond Avenue and bought a house on Captain Joubert Street. Their workday begins at 6:30 am and ends at 6:30 pm. They have raised their three children with great dedication. The oldest is Eric, who is eighteen, followed by Christine, and then Michel, who is fifteen. All three are lovely children: wise, independent, hyperactive. Partly because of that, father and mother thought they could realise their life's dream of starting their own business. They are usually already at work when the children wake up. Christine had asked over the weekend if she could sleep over at her friend Muriel's house on Monday night, which her parents denied. Still, she hadn't come home that night. When Christine had given no sign of life by Tuesday evening, Pierre Van Hees went to the Gendarmerie to report the incident. He had barely arrived home when the television news started. It takes until the night of Wednesday to Thursday before the police can confirm to the parents that their nightmare has become a reality.

It was the period of the late punk and New Wave. On April 6, 1967, Christine Van Hees was born to grow up into a dreamy teen. In the months before her death, she routinely argued with her parents about her dress style and going out. She had a penchant for sports: ice skating, swimming, and dancing lessons. At thirteen, she learned to ride horses in the stables of the La Cambre forest. She skated at the Poseidon skating rink at Woluwe, a meeting place for many young people. She swam in the Etterbeek municipal swimming pool near her parents' home. The independent radio station Radio Activité was located on the top floor of these premises. Christine Van Hees went to school in Anderlecht, where she had many friends and was also a member of the Scouts there. At least, that was what her parents thought. She gave the last sign of life that afternoon at about 5:20 p.m. to her former scouts' leader, Didier L.B.d.H. He was making photocopies at the newspaper shop "Le Club" on Wayez Street in Anderlecht. She was accompanied by a friend when she came to greet him. 'Christine did not attend any scouts

activities after July 1983,' Didier L.B.d.H. explained to the investigators.*12 This indicated that the girl was living a kind of double life. She repeatedly invoked scouting activities to her parents as a motive for prolonged absences, even after July 1983. Chantal V.I. is the friend who accompanied Christine on Wayez Street at 5:20 p.m. 'She was wearing black boots,' Chantal M.I. remembers. In addition, she carried a pair of new boots with her, a recent purchase. She mentions something else that might interest the investigation about her younger friend. Christine wanted to produce a play at school about a girl who had joined a cult. Chantal V.I. was perfect for the lead role, thought Christine. Chantal herself didn't like it much.*13

The reconstruction of the last hours before the murder is a set of certainties up to the moment of the subway ride. Chantal V.I. got on the train at the Saint-Guidon station with Christine Van Hees. Chantal V I. got off the train about halfway into the 1A route. Typically, Christine Van Hees should have arrived a little before six pm in the Pétillon station. Some witnesses saw her walk in the direction of her parental home. Didn't anyone in the neighbourhood notice anything? They did. At 6:45 pm, cleaning lady Yvonne L. hears from a nearby school the screams of a young girl from the direction of the old mushroom farm: 'No, no! Stop It! Mum!' The shouting continues for almost fifteen minutes. Those young folks again, Yvonne thinks to herself, and she continues to mop diligently. At about 7.05 pm, she sees two men, whom she estimates to be between twenty and twenty-five years old, crossing Avenue Triomphe and walking toward the Brussels University building. 'They were wearing dark clothes, and they did not seem to be in a hurry', Yvonne L. seemed to recall.*14 Another resident, Margriet DP, also heard screams between 6.30 and 6.50 p.m.*15 Yet another local heard the cries, but at 7.30 p.m. An anonymous witness declared that she heard from her hairdresser that Christine Van Hees was walking 'seemingly drugged' in the direction of the old mushroom farm that evening 'in the company of several young fellows.' *16 When the police grill barber Raymond D., he denies vehemently saying anything like that.*17 The people living in the neighbourhood are not very keen on the juveniles who occasionally go and smoke joints in the old Triomflaan building; that is clear. As helpful as the residents are, some of

Christine Van Hees's friends remain close-lipped. Whenever the Judicial Police officers start asking questions about truancy, meeting places and teenage meetings, they end up in a whimsical world where everyone seems to have something to hide.

Eleven days after the facts were revealed, the police interrogated Nathalie G. She had known Christine Van Hees since they were four. 'I'm aware that she didn't always tell her parents the truth,' says Nathalie G. 'She skipped class four days in January because she was tired of attending school. In the run-up to Christmas, she told her parents that she was going away for a weekend with the scouts. She didn't go there and spent the night in a café in the Soignies area. She told me that herself.'*18

Jean-Claude J. had a long talk with Christine Van Hees shortly before her death during the forestry classes in the Walloon Brabant town of Froidmont, near Rixensart, between Wednesday 8th and Friday 10th February. He remembers that she complained about her parents allowing her so little freedom. She had a boyfriend, Pierre S., and she used her friend Muriel A. as an excuse to see him more often than her parents allowed her. She claimed she would sleep over at Muriel A.'s house. 'But Muriel told me she hadn't seen Christine for two months.'*19 That, conversely, is a certainty: almost all students who took part in the forestry classes confirm that Christine Van Hees was there. And during the following weekend, she was at home the whole time.

In the Institute Mary Immaculate archives in Anderlecht, the police investigators found confirmation of Nathalie G's claims. Christine Van Hees gave the school clerk a doctor's certificate from January 20th to 24th, 1984. No one knows her whereabouts during that week. The doctor who delivered the certificate is Dr Hallard. He did this on January 25, 1984, hence retroactively.*20 The Van Hees parents have never heard of this doctor. There's more they don't know. They have never seen the boots their daughter arrives at school with on Monday afternoon. She bought them on the day of her death, or someone gifted them to her. Indeed, Christine Van Hees did have a boyfriend, Pierre S. She planned to introduce him to her parents that Sunday, but her parents would not have any of

it, her brother tells later. She was still too young, they thought. Pierre S. is only once briefly interrogated by the police investigators shortly after the murder. Pierre S. explains that he met her in the summer of 1983 after a scout trip to Ireland. He lives in Soignies, saw her about twenty times at most, and slept with her just once in late 1983.*21

Pierre S. can only be partially credited with the obscure side of her teenage life. It is not for him that she stayed away from school for a week in January. Soignies is far from Brussels, and no one noticed her there. Pierre S. was at school during the day. Who were her unknown friends, if she had any? On the evening of February 14, father Pierre Van Hees handed the investigators a letter he found in his daughter's room. It is titled 'Letter to Patty', counts two pages and ends as follows: 'I am not at home at number 24; I am where I would rather not be. I miss the ambience and the camaraderie of the community immensely so that I sink into a deep laziness/nostalgia.'*22

If Christine Van Hees had secrets, she shared them with Muriel A., classmates say. Others point to Patricia S., who is likely to be the "Patty". Christine denominated in her diary. Classmates inform the investigators that shortly after the murder, Patricia started dropping some hints that she would soon meet someone who "knew more". But Patricia does not help the investigators one bit. She, too, thinks that they had better ask Muriel A. She shrugs when they ask what Christine Van Hees could have meant with 'the community.' Patricia S. only confirms what the investigators already know; that morning before her death, Monday, February 13, she was a no-show. Her class had taken a guided tour to the Palace of Justice in Brussels that morning, without Christine, who arrived at school a little before 1 pm, sporting a new pair of boots. Green and in suede, Patricia S. remembers. She last saw her friend at the end of classes, at 4:30 p.m.*23 Patricia S., another classmate, later says she sometimes hung out with an 18-year-old boy with a punk haircut.

The punks. Everyone talks about them, yet no one seems to know them. But it is enough to look at them to assume they are up to no good. That is what the Brussels investigating judge Michel Eloy does. At least, as far as he has time for it. The murder of Christine Van Hees happened in the middle of a wave of attacks by the left-wing CCC terrorist group. That

investigation, too, has been entrusted to Eloy. Eloy does not bother to meet with the grieving parents once. Antoinette and Pierre Van Hees cannot afford a lawyer. As if the devil were involved, shortly after her murder, their shop was broken into, there was a problem with the insurance, and there were more than a million Belgian francs out of pocket. The bank started to have issues with their house loan. Pierre and Antoinette Van Hees throw themselves into their occupation full-time to take their mind off things, but they cannot forget. Never. 'If I think back on that period, or just talk about it, I feel sick for two days afterwards,' says Antoinette Van Hees. Nobody cared about us. If we ever spoke to the examining magistrate or one of the detectives, they made us feel that it was already too much trouble that we called.'²⁴ There is something unique about how the Brussels judiciary police conduct the investigation. Against all logic, two investigative leaders are appointed: Georges Ceuppens and Guy Collignon. The unpleasant consequence was that certain leads were pursued twice while others were not. It also leads to a situation where the magistrate in charge hardly has a say in the enquiry. As is often the case with the judiciary police, an informer drives the "breakthrough". It was the owner of a café where some judiciary police staff were regulars. The manager tells us he overheard a conversation with some young folks at his bar. Christine Van Hees, he said, had been murdered by a gang of punks who were living in a squat in the centre of Brussels. One of them - 'an individual named Jerome' - had disappeared from the scene since February 13. And, the café owner remembers, a Latin American music group is also involved in the case.²⁵

As the weeks pass, the gossip circuit points an incriminating finger at Christine. Didn't that girl somehow cause her own trouble? Why did she like to wear black so much? Tips reached the judiciary police, reporting that Christine Van Hees had been 'seen' among a group of punks on the steps of the Stock Exchange building or in the Agora Gallery in Brussels, where a few stores were specialising in extravagant clothing at the time. Here and there, the police search the homes of young punks, but to no avail. The idea that this hoodlum had the murder on his conscience had a stirring effect and not only at the offices of the judiciary police. On the 26th of April 1984, the 17-year-old Serge S. presented himself at the mobile

brigade of the Brussels gendarmerie. He reported that he had 'heard' that the perpetrator was a six-foot-tall punk, identifiable by his blond hair and bright red streak. The Gendarmerie dug up some old photos and soon identified their target: Alain Lenglet, 20, living in Oudergem.

When Alain Lenglet is subjected to an interrogation that day, he categorically denies any involvement, but his statements increase the investigator's tension. He, too, knows something. Friends of his knew Christine Van Hees and told him that the murder was the work of a sect. 'The Red Cult or something along those lines.' The sect members, says Lenglet, walk around in big red caps and his friend, who calls himself Le Petit Tondu, knows even more about it. This punk also frequents the Agora gallery sometimes and never read newspapers, except - suspiciously - in the days after the murder of Christine Van Hees. Le Petit Tondu, Alain Lenglet manages to reveal and regularly hangs out with the Iroquois.*26 The investigators are already getting fed up with the juggling with pseudonyms. Still, they can uncover that Le Petit Tondu is one Serge Braeckman, who was only seventeen years old, and that the Iroquois can be no other than the nineteen-year-old Serge Clooth.

On May 22, 1984, the Brussels judiciary police searched a squat at 161 Brand Whitlock Avenue in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe. There is an empty house there where Braeckman and Clooth lived until recently. Apart from an opium pipe and the remains of a few joints, the investigators also found a plasticised school notebook that contained no writing but from which some pages were removed.*27 From conversations with classmates, it has become clear that Christine Van Hees kept a secret diary and that the 'letter to Patty' must have been part of it somehow. The investigators think this diary must hold the key to solving this mystery. When the blank school notebook is shown to Pierre Van Hees, he formally states that his daughter also possessed one of these.*28 In the house at Brand Whitlock Avenue, some additional notes are found. Some bear the name of a certain Clochard, yet another punk.

Finding Braeckman and Clooth is easier said than done. They have no official residency and probably reside in yet another squat. As investigators turn their spotlights to the punk scene,

it begins to look more and more like the elucidation of Belgium's first satanic murder is becoming a reality. Muriel C., a punk girl named Moustique, creates a sensation. 'Le Petit Tondu has a bottle hanging around his neck containing ashes, which he received from a French druid,' she says. There is also a woman in the mix who performs black masses at home, has a real human skeleton, and settles personal disputes with pins and a ritual doll. A certain Beëlzebub and Lucifer are also involved in the case.*29 Moustique's father advises the investigators to take an interest in the man with whom Serge Braeckman is hanging out. He understands that Braeckman told him how delightful it had been to strangle a chicken by candlelight. As the detectives navigate the maze of punks, eighteen-year-old Sylvia Rossi arouses their attention. She is good friends with Clochard. Like so many others, she claims never to have known Christine Van Hees and to know nothing of the whole affair, but during a search, they stumble upon a darkened girls' room full of candles, cobwebs and skulls.

Braeckman's arrest on the 30th of May 1984 utterly surprised him. He willingly explains who he frequents in the punk and skinhead milieu and that his brother has vaguely known Christine Van Hees. On June 28, Clooth is arrested in Eupen.*30 Father and mother Van Hees read about it in the newspaper shortly after. The statements in the press in the most affirmative terms that their daughter hung out with drugged-up punks in the weeks before her death do not sit well with them. On July 27th, Pierre Van Hees raised a complaint at the judiciary police office .*31 Instead of some understanding or an open conversation, he is subject to none-too-tactful remarks about his daughter. By now, it is summer and the overtime that the police services piled up earlier in the year, courtesy of the Gang of Nivelles and the CCC terrorism activities, are starting to take their toll. A warrant issued by Commissioner Eloy for a search of Clooth's home and a series of interrogations is ignored by the judiciary police. Now, there's not much evidence on the Iroquois either. He is addicted to glue and only babbles gibberish during the first interrogations. Besides the notebook, the most incriminating element is on his chest. There are nine letters tattooed there: 'Christine'. Everything indicates that the only thing left is to wait patiently for his confession.

On July 30th, it is Clochards' turn to be interrogated. The man whose name appears in quite a few notes by the two main suspects turns out to be Marc Duriau; he is nineteen years old and points the finger mainly at Serge Braeckman: 'He told me himself that he burned her, poured petrol over her and that he tied her up with barbed wire. He claims he has nothing to do with the whole situation.*32

Serge Clooth, nineteen, is a striking figure. He sported a bright red mohawk, metal studs in his ears, wearing army boots. He already has several crimes under his belt, having been sentenced to two months in prison in 1983 for violent robbery. A psychiatric report states that Serge Clooth is 'seriously mentally disturbed' and 'has no control over his actions'. The latter is something the police investigators will experience first-hand.

On the evening of September 12th, however, it all looks promising. After hours of interrogation, he initially insists that he never knew Christine Van Hees, but then he breaks down. He says he met the girl for the first time in late January. In the company of Moustique, she was hanging out in the Agora gallery. 'That Christine was an old flirt of Kleenex,' says Serge Clooth. The investigators have identified Kleenex: Alain Debois, who is twenty-one. Kleenex owes his nickname to his fondness for sixteen-year-olds. He seduces them only to drop them again like paper towels. Clooth says he saw Christine Van Hees a few more times after the end of January, along with Moustique, Clochard, and several others. That evening, February 13th, he saw her at about 5:30 p.m. at the Montgomery Metro station. 'She was with Alain Lenglet, Vicious and a friend of Lenglet.' The gang walked to the Brussels University forecourt and pulled up to an abandoned lot with a large basement. There, says Clooth, Lenglet and his unknown friend began harassing the girl. She was raped and tortured - he only watched. According to Clooth, the unknown tied her up with iron wire and decided to burn her. Clooth cannot explain the writing found in the squat he occupied. He knows nothing about that.*33 The case seems resolved when Clooth identifies Vicious as Renaud Thill that day. Who exactly did what is still a mystery, but for investigators Ceuppens and

Collignon, it now seems only a matter of arrest and confrontation.*34

That same evening, Serge Braeckman returns to jail, even though he continues to deny any involvement.*35 Muriel C., alias Moustique, is arrested a little before midnight. She explains that Clooth and Braeckman once told her in a café that they had tied up Christine Van Hees with chains and set her on fire. 'But I never believed it', she adds*36 Even though there are now strong suspicions in the direction of Clooth, Lenglet, Braeckman and Thill, it remains guesswork to find a motive for inflicting such a gruesome death on the girl. On September 15th, Serge Clooth is again at the beck and call of his interrogators. He explains that it was an 'initiation ritual' that got out of hand, in which about twenty punks were involved. Christine Van Hees, he says, wanted to get away. She tried to inform the police, and then Lenglet and Vicious decided to silence her in a ritualistic way. The punk pseudonyms are now flying around the ears of investigators - 20 in total- but they can't put much faith in this story. They think that Clooth is trying to minimise his role.*37

In a talkative mood, Serge Clooth supplied them with a no less sensational but somewhat more severe-sounding motive on September 28th, 1984. Alain Lenglet told me that Christine Van Hees was aware of an attack on a military barracks in Ostend or Vielsalm,' he says, now asserting with great emphasis that he was only in the area and did not take part in the murder himself. 'The intention was to steal weapons to be utilised for hold-ups. I am convinced that they executed that girl for that reason.'*38 Clooth mentions some details about the old mushroom farm in his account, thus strengthening the suspicions that he is the main culprit. In this new version, some new names are already cropping up. The main perpetrators, says Clooth, were Coco and Lenglet.

The judiciary police didn't have much desire in 1984 to take an interest in suspects other than the punks. Another lead followed only briefly at the onset of the investigation, which was based on Christine Van Hees's correspondence with Pascal Lamarque, a nineteen-year-old. She had met him on a train in the fall of 1983. Lamarque was on his way to prison to serve a

sentence and begged her to write now and then. He wrote to her nine times, and Christine Van Hees answered four times. Her letters were found in her room. On December 20, 1983, less than two months before her death, Christine Van Hees wrote that she wanted to run away from home and drastically change her lifestyle: 'I beg you, don't ask me where. Don't ask me why, and even less why I can't write anymore.' The letter also contains a few lines from which one can conclude that she witnessed a conversation - 'and I am sure of what I heard' - that she would have been better off not hearing. In a subsequent letter, she writes: 'I experienced a miserable Christmas and a sad New Year. But it was great between the two because I met my life's love.' She reveals in the letter that the man in question is a young paratrooper.*39

On September 28th, Serge Clooth was summoned before investigating Judge Eloy. He supposes Clooth will repeat his spectacular revelations and partial confessions on this occasion. Clooth, however, does not confess. Yes, he was at the mushroom farm that night. He again rattled off a whole repertoire of known and unknown punk names. They had smoked a cigarette together there and danced a bit. And then that girl ran into a pole. We thought she was dead and left her there.' Period. End of story. No matter how Eloy and his detectives talk down to Clooth and point out that he stated something completely different the previous day, it doesn't help. What about Moustique? And Vicious and Le Petit Tondu? 'Oh, I earmarked them in because I had a score to settle with them.' When Clooth is interrogated by the judiciary police later that day, he suddenly confesses that he did rape Christine Van Hees shortly before her death but that Alain Lenglet is the murderer.*40

Four punks were arrested in late September: Serge Braeckman (Le Petit Tondu), Serge Clooth (the Iroquois), Alain Lenglet and Renaud Thill (Vicious). Detectives are by now beyond caring what the punks call themselves. It is clear to them that the punks committed the crime; the only question is which ones. In this atmosphere, the judiciary police learn with horror that one of the four has an ironclad alibi. Renaud Thill is performing his military service in Germany and is present at his post on February 13th, 1984. The detectives think the register has been tampered with, but after a few weeks, they

are told by the forensic lab and military authorities that they are mistaken. Thill is released. On October 3rd 1984, Clooth and Lenglet face off. Pandemonium ensues; the two prime suspects, suspected to be at each other's throats, suddenly find themselves in complete agreement. 'All I have stated so far is a fabrication,' says Serge Clooth. 'The details I have given you come from my imagination or result from the information I have received from you, reporters.' Alain Lenglet reiterates that he never knew Christine Van Hees.*41

Moreover, new searches for witnesses in the punk world yield less and less. In mid-October, only one more or less reliable-looking witness remains who links the murder of Christine Van Hees to Lenglet and Clooth. The witness's name is Dominique L. He is a 23-year-old employee of Radio Activité and a regular at the café Les Bouffons. Dominique L. claims he saw Christine Van Hees and a young paratrooper named Goossens in Alain Lenglet's company. He further argued that a certain Thierry D was often part of that company.*42 Thierry D, however, comes up with a completely different story. In his view, this was 'a political murder'. He says Christine Van Hees had come into contact with an extreme-right group.

On November 16th, 1984, Serge Clooth's grandmother visited the Gendarmerie of Kelmis, whose family originates in German-speaking Belgium. She wants to make a statement. Her son Stanley, Serge's father, recently received a visit from a young Brussels lawyer. According to her, it was revealed that the judiciary police forced her grandson to confess by administering drugs and alcohol to him. The Gendarmerie of Kelmis also takes Stanley Clooth's statement. He is convinced of his son's innocence but has little hope: 'He told me this was a political affair. That is why he is afraid to name names.'*43

On 26 November 1984, Serge Clooth threw a pot full of sansevierias on the floor in the Brussels judiciary police premises. He has a nervous breakdown, tries to free himself from his handcuffs and starts crying like a child. For an entire morning, he sat and explained that everything he had declared so far was either made up or read to him by the police. His interrogators have been looking at him with monkish smiles. Although unaware of this, Serge Clooth has legitimate reasons for being furious. On a previous occasion, he once provided an

alibi for his activities on February 13th 1984. Clooth himself is too confused to read his criminal file carefully, but if he were to do so, he should notice that it was established and - miraculously- still appears to be correct. On February 13, the day of the murder, he broke his right hand and went to the military hospital in Nederover-Heembeek to have it put in plaster. A certificate from the hospital confirms this.*44 That evening, his first concern was the condition of his mohawk hairstyle. His friend had coloured it in the Quick hamburger restaurant toilet in the Agora gallery. Lo and behold, the manager of the Quick was questioned by the police and believes he remembers chasing the annoying couple out of his establishment.

On 14 January 1985, Serge Clooth confessed that he and seven others had performed a 'black mass' that evening during which Christine Van Hees was 'sacrificed to Satan'. After gang rape, she was tied up, crucified and set on fire. Afterwards, he and his friends, four boys and three girls, burned her clothes in the house next door to the mushroom farm. Clooth now gives a series of details: the colour of her underwear, the cries she emitted, which suggests he must have picked up these details somewhere.*45

On 16 January 1985, Clooth repeats his confession to the examining magistrate and swears that this will remain 'his last and only correct version of the facts'. As if the contrary could still surprise him, Serge Clooth retracted his confession on June 17, 1985. The investigation and its coordination have ended up in a dead-end. In January 1985, investigating judge Eloy was stricken with a heart attack and suffered a nervous breakdown later. He took five months' sick leave, only to suddenly resign and leave for Seychelles without a word of explanation. A few more months went by before a new investigating judge was appointed in the person of Jean-Claude Van Espen on October 1, 1985. For the 38-year-old Van Espen, it would be one of the first cases he would have to deal with in his new position. Murder and manslaughter are not exactly his cup of tea. Van Espen has been a lawyer for a long time and feels much more at home in financial cases. He trusts the judiciary police officers Collignon and Ceuppens, who tirelessly continue to root around in the milieu of the punks.

Like his predecessor, Van Espen will not meet Christine Van Hees's parents. He will never visit the place where the facts took place. He will meet Serge Clooth for the first time on November 20, 1985. When Van Espen asks him how he may deny having anything to do with the murder but at the same time knows so many details about it, Clooth answers: 'When they were drawing up their reports, the people from the judicial police read to me what I had to say.'

Serge Clooth was interrogated sixteen times, changed his version eleven times and spent precisely three years, two months and four days in pre-trial detention.*46 When he was finally released on November 17, 1987, he was free of his solvent and other addictions, and social workers had talked to him for so long that he was happy to start a new life. Over the years, there has been only one element about which he has kept his version the same: the notebook. He can't remember it; he doesn't rule out a same-brand notebook there. And the tattoo on his chest? That was another Christine, but detectives never wanted to believe that. At some point, Clooth started digging into the file built up against him and made grim discoveries. The punk inquiry began with two tips. The first came from the pub owner, the second from a certain Jean Malotras.

In May 1984, he reported to the judiciary police that he had 'heard' that Clooth and Braeckman had something to do with the murder. Jean, Clooth remembers, was a drug dealer. Cloth and Braeckman once raided him and misappropriated a substantial amount of hashish. The sweet revenge of Jean Malotras? Nothing of the sort, Malotras says, when we interview him many years later. He never said anything to that effect. 'What I do remember is that during the interrogation, the Judicial Police had a terrible hold over me. I didn't feel like confessing that I was (drug) dealing.' So they tinkered with my statement. Everything was ok for me as long as the word hashish was not spoken. There's something else that strikes Malotras as bizarre. The robbery of Clooth and Braeckman happened a few days after the murder of Christine Van Hees. Okay, those two were very violent, but if they committed the murder, it must have been an accident that got out of hand. Well, I can't imagine that they would be so stupid as to walk

into the limelight by committing robberies immediately afterwards.'

Around the time of his release, Serge Clooth met the Brussels lawyer Didier de Quévy. With his even more renowned friend and confrère Jean-Paul Dumont, he went with Clooth to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In 1991, the Belgian state was sentenced to a hefty fine for exceeding the reasonable pre-trial detention period.*47 De Quévy blamed his young client's fickleness on the fact that the judiciary police rewarded confessions with drugs. That would be why he never wanted to repeat those confessions to the investigating magistrates. De Quévy defends more bizarre clients in the late 1980s. He was also the counsel of a certain Marc Dutroux from Marcinelle, who had to answer the Court of Appeal of Mons for kidnapping, torture, and rape of teenage girls in the Charleroi region.

How the marginalised youngsters in the Van Hees file contacted their lawyers is another fascinating epic. On the night of July 31st into August 1st 1986, we find four old acquaintances again at a drug party in Brussels with plenty shooting up and snorting going on. Alain Lenglet, Sylvia Rossi, Marc Duriau (Clochard), and his young lawyer Paul Blontrock are all at the party. Duriau does not survive the night. Lenglet has given him a slightly too generous dose of heroin. Lenglet will be sentenced to a correctional prison term of six years. Paul Blontrock was arrested a year after the facts for drug trafficking with the Van Hees arrests. Many years later, one of the punks will declare that 'Clochard was put out of action because he knew too much.' And that is also the view of Clooth himself. On February 10, 1987, he explained to the investigators how it had come to his attention that Clochard had had a falling out with Lenglet two days before his death. Everything revolved around his alibi -his presence at Agora Gallery- the night of Christine's murder. Clochard was there too, Clooth says. He had gotten remorse and wanted to tell the judiciary police everything, which was clearly against Lenglet's wishes.*48

On September 19th 1991, Pierre Van Hees stepped into the offices of the Brussels judiciary police. Shortly before, he had a

chat with Alphonse Van Asse, a manager of a newspaper store just like father Van Hees himself. Van Asse's store is only a few blocks away. After the death of Christine Van Hees, strange things happened. There were threatening phone calls such as 'We'll get you!'. Van Asse's store was broken into and suffered an arson attempt. Father Van Hees remarked that his name closely resembled Van Asse's and that perhaps the perpetrators mistook him for Van Hees. The judiciary police noted his statement but took no further action.*49 The Van Hees family gets more and more the feeling that nobody is genuinely interested in the murder of their daughter anymore. A few months later, judiciary police officer Guy Collignon came to pick up Michel Van Hees from school unannounced. He was driving an expensive Alfa Romeo, Christine's younger brother remembers. Together, they took a drive that ended at the front door of the Van Hees family. 'While I was eating, Collignon explained that the investigation was evolving towards important, high-profile people,' Michel Van Hees says later. 'He said it was better to leave those people alone, that he would soon be promoted and would probably no longer concern himself with the dossier.' From the manner in which Collignon conveyed his message, Michel Van Hees concluded that they had better put away all hope of finding the perpetrator.*50 Collignon was promoted a short time later.

A brief flurry of investigative zeal occurred in 1991. A new judiciary police officer took charge of the investigation. While re-reading all the information collected up to that point, he came across report 5125 drawn up by the Auderghem police on the 27th of February, 1984, two weeks after the events. It quotes a resident who says that in October 1983, he saw Christine Van Hees having a lengthy conversation with the driver of a black car with a giant eagle on the hood, a potential lead. More than seven years after the facts were revealed, a neighbourhood inquiry was conducted, and several people also remembered a black or dark-coloured car with an eagle on it. A classmate believes he noticed such a car in front of the school just after the Christmas holidays of 1983-84. The two occupants avoided contact, and he believes Christine knew the two men. He estimates they were twenty to twenty-five years old. 'They were dressed sportily; they were not punks or skinheads.'*51 Additional testimonies about the dark car are

collected, and through testing and elimination, the detectives decide that it must be a Pontiac Firebird Trans Am. Only a small number of this type of sports car were sold on the Belgian market in the early 1980s. The standard version featured the silver eagle on each hood. It turns out later that just under a thousand cars driving around in Belgium in 1984 fit the bill. Questioning neighbours and acquaintances so many years after the fact is not as absurd as it seems. Christine Van Hees' friends talk easier now than they did then. Everyone seems to have known that she regularly skipped school and sometimes went out at night when her parents were asleep. However, seven years later, no one seems sure whether she ended up in punk or related circles.

Another suspicion from 1984 now becomes a quasi-certainty. Christine Van Hees had a diary and kept it secret obsessively. Fearing that her brothers or parents would find it, she hid it in an abandoned house near the Delta metro station. The place was named 'Le Chalet', and there, in May 1984, a bizarre find was made: a large envelope in which the gendarmerie stores detainees' belongings during their transport. The envelope came from the Gendarmerie of Vilvoorde and was destined for the brigade of Brussels.*52

In 1991, another suspect suddenly appeared, a famous one at that. Michel Strée, the unstable young man from Liège who hijacked a bus full of school children on the 14th of November 1980, with which he entered the RTBf television studios, drove a 1984 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am and a Chevrolet Caprice. Both cars were black and had an eagle on the hood.*53 After a long and intensive search, it appears that Strée could not have been in Brussels in February 1984. Further searching for the eagle-adorned car is attempted but yields no results. In June 1996, the parents of Christine Van Hees found a letter from examining magistrate Jean-Claude Van Espen in their mailbox. To his great regret, the magistrate has to inform them that the murderer of their daughter Claudine has not been found and will send the dossier back to the public prosecutor's office—end of the investigation. After thirteen years, the investigating judge still does not know the victim's name.

The parents sold their store in 1995. Father Van Hees was suffering from a heart condition. They have grandchildren now

who are welcome at any time, which helps them take their minds off things. The wall in the living room does not; the photo of a lively Christine is still smiling at them. When the Dutroux case escalated, Pierre and Antoinette watched in amazement as Gino Russo, Paul Marchal, and others stirred up crowds on an issue that few people had to confront as long and painfully as they had. Every day, upon opening the newspaper, a new father or mother cries out for attention to a missing or murdered child. At no time does it occur to them to raise awareness of their daughter's case, Christine. It's been so long.

Additionally, no one asks them anything until October 29th, 1996, a week after the White March. The telephone rings; it's the Brussels BOB. 'Can we pay you a short visit? It's in connection with your daughter. Gendarmerie officer Michel De Mulder felt the distrust of the parents that morning. His superiors have strictly forbidden the Master Sergeant of the antenna-Neufchâteau to mention X1. De Mulder mumbles something about formality, routine, databases, verifications ... nothing in particular. Antoinette Van Hees gives him seven photos but makes the officer promise to return them as soon as possible. 'Make copies of them.' He accepts a quick cup of coffee. Pierre Van Hees tells him that 'the judiciary police were doing a sound job, but when something happened within that department, things started going wrong'. De Mulder asks if they have ever received any insight into their daughter's dossier. 'No, they haven't.' They have had no overview of the inquiry at all. The judiciary police first interviewed mother Antoinette... in 1991. Christine's godmother was never questioned. Yet, she knew the girl very well. When the judiciary police finally intended to talk to her in 1992, she had already passed away. On December 4th 1996, adjutants Patriek De Baets and Marc Mertens stepped into the office of national magistrate Duinslaeger. There it is, ten huge folders: the mushroom factory murder dossier. Duinslaeger has been studying X1's statements. He was the one who concluded that the 'Kristien' mentioned by X1 could not be anyone other than Christine Van Hees. He informed Magistrate Paule Somers of the new data and thus paved the way for the legal means to reopen the investigation. 'Make sure the dossier stays intact,' says Duinslaeger—so much paper. Now, maybe they will find

out the truth. Mertens is not a believer by any means. He expects more from this pile of dusty paper than from a valley of tears in the interrogation room. If Dutroux and Nihoul had anything to do with the murder of Christine Van Hees, things would have to have gone seriously wrong in the old investigation if nothing in that dossier would have supplied any clues to that hypothesis, he reasons.

When De Baets and Mertens arrive with their paper load at the offices of the Neufchâteau BOB, First Sergeant Aimé Bille is eagerly waiting for them. The task of trawling through this old dossier is right up his alley. In the Neufchâteau investigation, Bille holds the record for producing police reports. Bille is not a great strategist but rather the workhorse, the conscientious executor. He sometimes interrogates ten or fifteen people a day. He doesn't waste time at the coffee machine and never takes a lunch break. De Baets says his task will now be to synthesise the old judicial file comprehensively. Sergeant Khalifa, a rookie gendarme, will assist him with this task. In the meantime, a lot has happened at the Brussels BOB. The Neufchâteau branch has been set up under the thesis that this detective cell will occupy itself with nothing but the side files for years to come. Jean-Luc Duterme, a commander, has been placed at the head of the antenna. He is an officer to whom the demilitarisation of the Gendarmerie has not hit home, it soon becomes apparent. 'And what are you doing?' asks commander Duterme to Bille as he sits plugging through the near-dozen ring binders on Saturday 14th December.

In Duterme's opinion, gendarmes should only work on Saturdays if they have submitted a well-reasoned written request in duplicate, which their hierarchical superiors must also approve. 'My boss has asked me to make a summary,' Bille responds. 'I haven't asked you for anything,' Duterme retorted. He instructed Bille to complete the summary as quickly as possible. On December 23, he completed the first 88-page summary. Considering Commander Duterme's words, Aimé Bille included only the case documents required in the context of X1's testimony. During a strategy meeting on January 2nd 1997, in the office of Deputy Somers, she asked Bille why he had not summarised the whole dossier. Because as things stand, one could deduce that the investigation is deliberately

focused on X1's testimony. Bille is only too happy to produce a complete synthesis, receive the order, and return to work. He promptly gets a sanction from Commander Duterme for insubordination and is removed from the Neufchâteau cell on the spot. Only after mediation by De Baets and Mertens is he allowed to return.*54 Commander Duterme makes no secret of his well-founded doubts about X1. His main argument demonstrates a sound degree of level-headedness: how can Christine Van Hees have met Dutroux and Nihoul when all of the investigations carried out in Neufchâteau up to that point seemed to indicate that they only got to know each other in 1995? When Bille delivered his synthesis report on January 28th 1997, he was convinced that Duterme would welcome him with an apologetic pat on the back.

One of the first things Bille noticed when browsing the dossier was the transcript of an audio cassette. It was attached to the official report with number 33797, drawn up by the Etterbeek police at 4.10 pm on April 27, 1987. They had received an anonymous telephone call and recorded it then. Bille went to collect the tape from the registry of the Brussels correctional court and listened to it.

- Etterbeek police? Excuse me, sir. To stay up to date, go to the café Dolo, at 140 rue Philippe Baucq.
- Officer: What's going on there?
- You might find some clues about the Mushroom farm.
- Officer: What do you mean?
- On the corner of Rue Philippe Baucq, the Dolo. If you drop by that place occasionally, you will learn more about the Mushroom farm.
- Officer: Why do you say that sir?

Then, the anonymous caller cut the connection. On the 30th of April 1987, investigating judge Van Espen, Bille remarked, sent out a letter asking the judiciary police to find out who the anonymous caller might have been and what kind of establishment he was referring to with his tip. On 22 May, judiciary police officer Vercruysse sent his findings to Van Espen. There is no mention of The Dolo anymore. Instead, he refers to a café called Chez Dolores and states that the police identified the voice in Etterbeek as a young North African'.*55

There is no mention in the report of further investigation into the type of clients who frequent The Dolo.

As of August 23, 1984, another statement in the dossier was found, in which the detectives were to scrutinise Radio Activité. This tip is not anonymous. It comes from Freddy vdS, who worked as a bouncer at the end of 1983 at the New Inn discotheque along the Waversesteenweg, near the old mushroom farm. Right across from that establishment is the bar Les Bouffons. Quite a few criminal underground characters frequent this place. According to Freddy vdS, Christine Van Hees was seen several times late in the evening at the end of 1983. He noted that she dressed 'very provocatively'. He noticed her in the company of a young para commando named Marc Goossens and some people from Radio Activité, who had made Les Bouffons their regular pub.*56 The radio station Radio Activité was located above the municipal swimming pool of Etterbeek, where Christine Van Hees went swimming once a week. Bille begins to count how often Radio Activité is mentioned in the old file, which is a quasi-impossible task. Several witnesses say that Christine Van Hees occasionally visited Radio Activité. Michel Nihoul was a regular at The Dolo and was the de facto leader figure at Radio Activité. Coincidence? Perhaps. But one cannot mention this because all these years, the judiciary police have only wanted to see one direction: the punks, receiving the remarkably active support of a certain Dominique L. It was he who talked Alain Lenglet into jail.*57

When Bille enters the name of Dominique L. into the gendarmerie computer, a list of eighteen points correlates to events he was involved with. Dominique L's name also shows up five times in the Central Signals Sheet (CSB) of the Belgian police services. In 1990, he was the subject of an investigation for indecency with a girl younger than fourteen, which resulted in a house search at his residence, where the police found child pornography. A vice dossier started against D.L. at the Brussels public prosecutor's office was closed for unclear reasons. In 1985, D.L. was arrested for illegal firearms possession. He then tried to avoid scrutiny by presenting an ID card that seemed to identify him as an inspector of the judiciary police. When the police discovered this was, in fact, a

falsified document, D.L. declared that he 'knew a lot of people' at the judiciary police in Brussels - which does not seem to be a lie, given his frequent interventions in the Van Hees file.*58

Could it be that Dominique L. was thrown into the mix to throw the detectives off the trail? D.L. must have known Michel Nihoul in 1984. Not only were they together at Radio Activité, but Dominique L. also worked occasionally for the municipality of Etterbeek when party evenings were organised in the municipal hall De Gerlache or the infamous castle Faulx-les-Tombes. He later became a bouncer at The Dolo. In the last-ditch effort to put this investigation on track, the judiciary police interrogated Nathalie G. for a second time in April 1992, Bille notes. Nathalie G. was Christine Van Hees' childhood friend. During the interrogation, she shows her diary to the detectives. The old file now contains a photocopy of what she wrote on February 29, 1984, two weeks after the murder. She writes in emotional terms about her assassinated friend: 'I think of you very much, and of all the follies we committed together. There will always be a secret that connects us, a secret that will always be between us and that no one else will know.' Nathalie G. would not say a word about this secret to the investigators. She assures them that it has absolutely nothing to do with your investigation.*59 Nathalie G. says she saw

Christine Van Hees for the last time on Saturday, February 11th, 1984. Nathalie G. lived on the same street, and Christine had visited her. Christine was behaving strangely, Nathalie noted. 'When she left my place, she asked me to stay at my door and watch her until she had entered her home. She had never asked me that before.'*60

In an investigation into the gruesome murder of a sixteen-year-old girl, the Brussels judiciary police evidently judged this to be an irrelevant afterthought. Bille reads the entire file backwards and forwards, but there is no evidence that the judiciary police did anything to discover who could have threatened Christine Van Hees except for punks. It's true,' says Nathalie G. when Bille starts questioning her. Christine asked me to accompany her until she had entered her house. She was scared. It was not a comedy. She was genuinely petrified. She never explained to me why she was in such a state.' And

the following information, the judiciary police never deemed worthy of an entry in a police report neither, let alone further investigation: the night before the murder, Nathalie G. noticed a suspicious black car in front of the Van Hees' house.' A Volvo or a Mercedes, Nathalie G. remembers. 'There was a man behind the wheel. The car remained there from half past eleven until one in the morning.' Bille lets Nathalie G. leaf through a photo album and asks her if she recognises any individuals she has seen before in Christine Van Hees's company. That one over there, she says. And that one over there. The photos she points to bear the codes P1E and P1L. Nathalie G. herself has no idea who she pointed out. Aimé Bille does know. P1E and P1L are two photos of Marc Dutroux dating from the early 1980s.*61

The name Poseidon pops up even more often than the station Radio Activité in the old file. The judiciary police officers interviewed some thirty former visitors of the Poseidon skating rink in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe. Christine Van Hees went there almost every week in the months before her death and met young people of all sorts. Furthermore, the (attempted) identification of the many friends she met there leads to an extended lexicon of nicknames and first names. One is Marc C., also known as 'Marc the Swiss'. But there was also another Marc, explains Poseidon visitor Ariane M. in March 1986. According to her, Christine Van Hees had a date with this unknown Marc shortly before her death. I don't know who he is, but if I remember correctly, I heard him say that he came from "the provinces", from the region of Mons. *62

Was this Marc Dutroux? Was it the never-identified para commando who used to call himself Marc Goossens? The judiciary police did not take the trouble to find out; the detectives of the Neufchâteau cell did, but they did not have the time for it in 1997.*63 It is certain that there has never been any mention of Marc Goossens among the visitors of Poseidon, if that is his family name at all. The personal description of Goossens corresponds, at best, only partially to that of Dutroux. However, what might match is the statement of a friend of Christine Van Hees, who claims that shortly before her death, she had met 'someone from a motorcycle gang.' There are reasons to believe this is the mysterious

"Marc" from the Bergen area.*64 Marc Dutroux struck up a conversation with some BOB officers during an interrogation in 1996. The conversation is about motorcycles. He, too, owned a bike more than ten years ago, says Dutroux. And, he adds: 'I used to hang out with a motorcycle gang from the area.'*65

Marc Dutroux is known to be an excellent skater, and in the mid-eighties, he repeatedly went out to molest young girls at skating rinks or swimming pools. He met Michèle Martin in 1981 at the skating rink of Vorst, where he was working as an overseer for some time, along with the then nineteen-year-old from Brussels, Francis H. Michèle Martin explained to the Neufchâteau investigators on December 4th, 1996 how and where she first met Dutroux and what they did together during that period. 'At the time, not long after we had first met, we went together to the skating rinks of Vorst and Woluwe,' explains Martin. 'Dutroux went to the Poseidon every week back then. From 1983, when I became pregnant, Dutroux went skating alone. I wasn't even allowed to sit in the cafeteria with him anymore. What he wanted was to be able to seduce girls undisturbed.'*66 Frédéric Dutroux was born on June 2nd, 1984. On February 13th of that year, Michèle Martin was nearly six months pregnant.

On April 12th 1997, the Brussels BOB interrogated Francis H. The investigators want to learn more about Dutroux's skating antics from him. 'I met him in 1981 at the ice-skating rink in Forest, ' he explains. It was there that we seduced Michèle Martin, him especially. Later, we sometimes went to the Poseidon, but Michèle Martin was never there. I never saw her when she was pregnant.' Francis H. does remember that for Dutroux, ice skating was already a pretext for harassing young girls at the time. However, his knowledge does not extend beyond the end of 1983 because of a fierce dispute he had with Dutroux because he had broken into Dutroux's house. Dutroux also drove around with a van at that time, which always had a mattress, H. remembers. Dutroux often spent the night in his vehicle.*67

Francis H. worked at the independent radio station Arc- en- Ciel in Schaarbeek in the early 1980s. A certain Philippe

Moussadyk also worked there at the time. When detectives from the Brussels judiciary police searched Christine van Hees' bedroom a few days after being murdered, they found a small phone book. 'The phone book mainly contained classmates, neighbours and relatives', concluded judiciary police officer Collignon in an official report.*68 The report also announced an additional investigation of the phone numbers, but Aimé Bille could find no trace of them in the old file. Christine Van Hees' telephone book includes `736.16.43 = Phil Chevalier, FM Inter'. Phil Chevalier appears to be the pseudonym of a deejay on this free radio. His real name is Philippe Moussadyk. Conclusion: Christine Van Hees went skating on the same ice rink as Marc Dutroux and was friends with a colleague of his best friend. Francis H. closed himself off to the outside world since the Dutroux case. Philippe Moussadyk fled Belgium.

The Brussels judiciary police interrogated Moussadyk on September 27th, 1984, not because of the phone book but because a friend of Christine Van Hees pointed him out as someone who knew her well. Moussadyk's declaration on that day sheds new light on Christine Van Hees's time allocation in the last months of her life and strongly suggests that Moussadyk is trying to hide something. He tells a story that makes no chronological sense. 'I met that girl over a year ago,' he explains. 'She had called me because she had to create a school paper on the media sometime around Christmas of 1983. All in all, she came to see me seven or eight times. She always came in the afternoon, and I think she skipped classes then. She came around two o'clock and stayed until six.' She never fell in love with him, 'but we were very intimate.' He also vividly remembers how she brought him a Valentine's Day gift. He also went with her to Radio Cinquantenaire on a few occasions, yet another independent radio station, where he was active from November 1983 to February 1984. When the police asked Moussadyk why he didn't hear from her, he replied that he wasn't aware she had been murdered. The investigators riposted that all the newspapers reported the murder, and the photo of Christine Van Hees had been published in many of them. 'I don't read newspapers', claimed Moussadyk, which appears strange for someone who invites teenage girls to help them with school assignments about 'the

media'. And there is an additional peculiar element: Christine Van Hees was murdered the day before Valentine's Day, 1984. So how could she have given him a gift as he claimed? I made a mistake; it must have been a year earlier, he replied, even though he had stated just prior that he met Christine Van Hees around Christmas 1983.*69

Philippe Moussadyk does not tell us - and the judiciary police do not check this either- that apart from Radio Arc-en-Ciel, FM Inter and Radio Kiss, he was also active with a fourth broadcaster: Radio Activité.*70 In itself, this is not so surprising because the French Community was economical with allocating broadcasting licenses at the time; they were obliged to cooperate.*71 In the period in which Michel Nihoul was the devil-doer at Radio Activité, there was a form of cooperation and an intense mutual turnover of employees. One of the first people to be interrogated by the Neufchateau antenna in December 1996 is Michel Van Hees, Christine's youngest brother. He may be influenced by what the BOB officers tell him or by current events at that time. Still, he sounds pretty sure of his views: 'I think I saw Michel Nihoul at the time in the cafeteria above the swimming pool in Etterbeek and Marc Dutroux at the skating rink in Woluwe.'*72 Michel Van Hees is not the only one who makes such statements. In the spring of 1997, about forty regular Poseidon visitors from 1984 were, without being given any prior context, confronted with a thick photo album. It contained, among other things, pictures of Marc Dutroux as he looked in the early 1980s, of Bernard Weinstein, of some of the Neufchateau suspects and of Jean Van Peteghem, the man who later joined Dutroux in kidnapping children. Almost one in three picks out the young Dutroux. Some seven skaters of yesteryear also point to Bernard Weinstein.

In the spring of 1998, the three public prosecutors in charge of the X1 files announced that Regina Louf could no longer be considered a useful witness. Paule Somers, a substitute, explained on behalf of the Brussels public prosecutor's office. She does this in the left-leaning newspaper De Morgen, among other places: 'We have to prove things legally, that is our job. The chance that Marc Dutroux and Christine Van Hees met each other at the skating rink is minimal. Dutroux went skating in Vorst, and Christine went to Sint-Lambrechts-

Woluwe. Only once did she go skating to Vorst.*73 Paule Somers has obviously read very little of the dossier for which she is responsible. The indications that Marc Dutroux had been skating at the same rink as Christine Van Hees - not in Vorst, but Woluwe - were not limited to the statements of his wife, Michele Martin and his skating partner at the time. On August 13, 1996, the day of the decisive arrest of Marc Dutroux, the Charleroi police searched his house along the Route de Philippeville in Marcinelle. Laetitia Delhez and Sabine Dardenne were not found that (first) time. The investigators confiscate several documents. And what's in there? The timetables of the skating rinks of Charleroi, Namur, Forest and... the Poseidon in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert are confirmed by the BOB report about this search.*74 Later, during a search in Sars-la-Buissière, an old diary of Michèle Martin was also examined. They double-check the telephone numbers that appear in it. On one page, two numbers are listed: 021345.16.11 and 021762.16.33. The first number is that of the National Ice Rink of Forest. The second is that of the Poseidon skating rink in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert.*75

In Christine Van Hees's letter to her friend Patricia S. shortly before her death, she talks about 'the community'. This makes the judiciary police officers in 1984 spontaneously think of some sinister punk society. Their testimonies showed that Christine Van Hees was attracted to that little world. But there are also other testimonies, as Aimé Bille discovers. This is what he finds in the first ring binder. It is the anonymous testimony of a girl who took the bus with Christine Van Hees daily. During her first contact with the judiciary police on February 20, 1984, she only wanted to testify anonymously.

'We met in October 1983. Over time, our conversations became more and more intimate. Christine told such incredible things that I became more convinced she was fabricating things. She told me that she had become acquainted with a group of people. She regularly saw them in an abandoned house near her home in October and November 1983. These people were older than Christine. She explained that meetings were held in that house; there was a road to it that no one knew about. In the group were other girls. Occasionally, she said, she

would go to that house alone to write in her journal. Christine never talked about this with girls in her class. I was stunned when she told me what happened there. She told me that if she ever talked about this with her parents or her brothers, her so-called 'friends' would kill her and set her parental house on fire. She made me understand that in this group, "people made free love" (...). She told me that this group attracted and frightened her in equal measure. In early 1984, it occurred to me that Christine had changed greatly. She was emaciated, paler and less well-groomed. She said she wanted to blow up all her bridges because bad things had happened. I noticed that she had bruises and a cigarette burn on her arm. She then explained to me that it had started as a game, that these games started rather inconspicuously but then turned violent. Christine had come into conflict with one of the other girls in the group. She was very attracted to a member of the gang. She told me that it was possible to be sexually attracted to a boy without really loving him in the process. She played truant. About her friends, she said, 'They are pigs, but I feel good with them.' She told me you could never escape that environment once you got into it. There was little point, she said, in talking to anyone about it since no one would believe her.*76

The witness explains to her interrogators that the people Christine Van Hees described 'were not punks, nor were they skinheads'. As far as she could tell from her friend's words, some rode motorcycles, were 20 to 25 years old, and one smoked heavy Gitanes cigarettes.

The girl was questioned a second time in 1986. On that occasion, she no longer testified anonymously. Her name is Fabienne K., and she was the same age as Christine. She confirms her entire statement from two years earlier. She was interrogated third and fourth in March 1993 but was already less candid. There are good reasons for this. In an earlier statement, she explained that she had undergone an abortion at a young age in a separate medical service at the University Libre Bruxelles. She added that Christine Van Hees had inquired about that address then. To her dismay, Fabienne K. learned that the judiciary police subsequently searched the department in question but found no trace of any file on

Christine Van Hees. During the new hearings, Fabienne K. nevertheless confirms everything she said at the time with this small addition: 'Christine suggested I should skip classes and come along to that group, but I refused.'*77

Aimé Bille discovers another intriguing detail. The man who caused Fabienne K's unwanted pregnancy is named Derochette. The BOB makes some inquiries, and yes, he is a full cousin of Patrick Derochette. He was in the same school as Christine Van Hees in 1984, but at first sight has nothing to do with the whole affair.*78 Fabienne K. will never be interrogated by the antenna Neufchâteau. After she finished her secondary education, she got involved with drugs and ended up in prostitution.

What if Regina Louf had not existed, but the records of the judicial system in Belgium had already been sufficiently automated by the end of 1996 to flag up keywords such as Radio Activité, Poseidon, Dolo or Francis H.? 'Then the Van Hees dossier would have been reopened for sure,' a former antenna Neufchâteau detective reminisces. 'As far as I am concerned, you can eliminate everything from the story of X1 and consign it to the realm of fantasy. In retrospect, I don't believe much of what she says—only the mushroom farm file I don't understand. I would like to understand it, but I cannot. Even if the entire testimony came about thanks to suggestive questions, a vivid imagination and coincidences, that doesn't explain everything in this old file. Those are facts.'

Back to the story of the car adorned with the eagle. The judiciary police moved heaven and earth in 1991 to locate anyone driving such a car who could also have met Christine Van Hees. 'I was working as a volunteer at Radio Activité at the time,' says Didier V. 'I knew Michel Nihoul well. At the time, he drove a dark brown Mitsubishi Celeste with an eagle on the hood. His girlfriend Marleen De Cokere also drove around with it.'*79 'It was a Datsun or a Mitsubishi Celeste,' believes resident Jean-Pierre G. 'I often saw that car in front of the offices of Radio Activité.'*80 'Correct; a brown Mitsubishi', says DV, who worked at the independent radio station. 'I don't know if an eagle was on the hood, but it could be.'*81 'Nihoul had a brown Datsun Coupe at the time, two doors, with an eagle on the hood', says Dolo visitor and free radio man

Christian V. G. 'He gave me a lift in that car on several occasions.'*82 The day before he and his colleagues were removed from the investigation, First Sergeant Bille obtained confirmation from the Ministry of Traffic that Marleen De Cokere had purchased a Mitsubishi Celeste in April 1983.*83 Investigators knew Marc Dutroux's somewhat nomadic existence in 1984 and that he made a living much like he did a decade later. Stealing cars, robbing construction sites.... that sort of thing. But what does an analysis of his bank accounts reveal? On February 15th 1984, two days after the murder of Christine Van Hees, Marc Dutroux opened an account with the bank Crédit Professionnel du Hainaut with number 125-3655647-02 and received a deposit of 35,000 Belgian francs. Two days later, on February 17th 1984, another deposit of 100,000 francs was made. Dutroux and Martin have another account at the same bank with the number 125-4471447-32. On February 15th 1984, this other account was credited with a deposit of 50,000 francs. On the same day, another 15,000 francs arrive in that account. Only the last two deposits can be found in the bank's archives. The 50,000 francs were handed over in cash at the counter, and the 15,000 francs were by check. 'In total, 200,000 francs are deposited into Marc Dutroux's accounts in the week following the murder of Christine Van Hees,' Aimé Bille concludes*84 His colleague Baudouin Dernicourt also examined Marc Dutroux's accounts at the Crédit Professionnel du Hainaut nine months earlier. He notes that there have been no financial movements on this account since 1986 and concludes: 'Nothing important to report for our investigation.'*85 It is remarkable how two BOB officers within the same investigative cell and based on the same data come to contradictory conclusions.

The way the judiciary police handled this investigation is just as troubling. A scarf -possibly belonging to Christine Van Hees- was found near the crime and has gone missing. The numbers of a telephone book found while searching her bedroom were never verified. The phone book is no longer in the file. The judiciary police officers returned it to the parents, and the BOBs would recover it many years later. And what do they find? The judiciary police officers have made notes in this telephone book with a pencil. For one of the girlfriends, they write: 'No longer had contact with her'. When the BOB speaks

to this friend anyway, she says that she saw Christine Van Hees a week before she died.*86

Christine Van Hees was buried on 21 February 1984. On that occasion, the judiciary police filmed and photographed many of the attendees. No trace of those images can be found in the file. The "letter to Patty"; the last signal sent by the victim before her death, was only added to the file in 1989. Doctor Hallard, who helped Christine Van Hees obtain a false doctor's note at the end of January 1984, was not questioned until December 1988, almost five years after the facts. It is, therefore, not surprising that the doctor can no longer remember anything.*87

In 1984, some witnesses reported having seen Christine Van Hees ringing the doorbell of a mansion at 144 Boulevard Adolphe Buyl in Ixelles on several occasions. The judiciary police limit their search to going to the place and noting the names mentioned on the house doorbell. The antenna Neufchâteau continues its search because it is intrigued by a specific name: CL Leroy. It soon transpires that this was not the former Brussels substitute but a student. The investigation also revealed that Christine Van Hees had never been in the apartment. The witnesses mistook her for one of her nieces - which immediately raises questions about how the judiciary police recorded testimonies.*88

In the weeks after the murder, the judiciary police secretly record the license plates of the visitors of the Poseidon. A list of these registered number plates is added to the file, but the judiciary police will never make the logical effort to find out to whom the license plates belong. This will only happen thirteen years later when the Neufchâteau antenna took over the case.*89 On February 28th 1984, Albert D.B. was interrogated. He is a young photographer for whom Christine Van Hees posed shortly before her death. These photos are still displayed in the living room of the father and mother Van Hees. When the judiciary police interrogated DB at the end of February 1984, he claimed they pressured him to "confess right away". "They threatened to give me an injection, a kind of truth serum."*90

On the 2nd of July 1991, more than seven years after the facts, the judiciary police had an artist rendition drawing made,

based on the statements of a neighbour, of a young man she thought she had seen on the 13th of February 1984 in the neighbourhood of the old mushroom farm. This artist's rendition picture would never be circulated or shown to Christine Van Hees' parents, friends, or acquaintances. Old Jef, the fellow who directed the firefighters to the fire in the mushroom farm that night, was never interrogated. On the 30th of September 1988, investigating judge Van Espen asked his investigators to do this anyway. Three months later, the judiciary police officers reported to him with great regret that Old Jef had died in 1986.

At the Brussels judiciary police, the fact that the Gendarmerie was conducting an inquiry into their inquiry was not very appreciated. On 7 February 1997, in a letter to the Brussels public prosecutor Benoit Dejemeppe, Ceuppens and Collignon expressed their dissatisfaction with this state of affairs. Based on what both judiciary police officers still remember about it, they think it's crazy to suppose that the murder of Christine Van Hees could have something to do with the Dutroux case.*91 Former inspector Michelle Bogaert, who led the investigation initially but left the Brussels judiciary police in 1992, is a bit more open-minded. She, too, cannot answer many substantive questions, but she does sketch the atmosphere in which things took place. She says Commissioner Christian De Vroom made a tactical error in this case. He appointed two people responsible at the time, inspectors Collignon and Ceuppens. In our services, that was unique. Two teams worked side by side.' Although all the attention went in that direction, the ex-inspector never found the leads into the punk scene credible. 'If the punks had done it, I think they would have taken the victim's jewellery, but they didn't. According to Bogaert, Christine Van Hees's much-discussed secret diary was eventually found, even though there is no mention in the dossier. 'I would not know where that secret diary has disappeared to.' As for Fabienne K., she is convinced to this day that she knew much more about the case but, for some reason, did not dare to talk about it. Former inspector Bogaert vaguely remembers something about leads to Le Dolo; she also remembers that several of her male colleagues knew that establishment well but says she has no idea why the tip-offs were not investigated any further.*92

Bogaert still has some documents from the old file at home, and she is quite willing to hand them over to the antenna-Neufchâteau, which happens a week later. When leaving the gendarmerie buildings, something comes to mind. It happened sometime in the late 1980s. Lawyer Jean-Paul Dumont entered our buildings and talked to some investigators working on the Van Hees case. 'You have come very close to the golden ticket,' he said. We asked him what he meant by that, but he responded that he could not explain more because of his professional secrecy.*93

NOTES:

1. Brussels Fire Department, February 13, 1984, intervention report no. 1499.
2. Ayfer Erkul (De Morgen), interview with Lieutenant Vanden Berghen, December 1996.
3. Interrogation of Norbert Van den Berghe, judiciary police Brussels, 20 March 1986, PV 8528.
4. Interrogation of Yvan Leurquin, Brussels BOB, 1 April 1997, PV 151.013.
5. Police Auderghem, 13 February 1984, PV 30.14.32
6. Judiciary police Brussels, deposit with the registry of the disciplinary court of Brussels, no. 3275.
7. The poster announced a musical evening at the Randstad Youth House in Molenbeek on February 17, 1984.
8. Judiciary police Brussels, deposit with the registry of the disciplinary court of Brussels, no. 3275.
9. The first report of medical expertise after dismounting at the scene was on February 13, 984. Doctor Voordeckers sent this report to the public prosecutor on 23 February 1984.
10. Autopsy performed on February 14, 1984.
11. The findings of this medical expertise, also carried out on 14 February, were included in a report of the judiciary police Brussels, 21 February 1984, PV 5790.
12. Interrogation of Didier L.B.d.H., Judiciary Police Brussels, 18 February 1984, PV 6442.

13. Interrogat
ion of Chantal MI., Brussels GP, 23 February 1984, PV
6959.
14. Interrogat
ion of Yvonne L., police of Auderghem, February 15,
1984, PV 4880.
15. Interrogat
ion of Margriet DP, Brussels police, 18 February 1984.
16. Anonymo
us testimony, Judiciary police Brussels, 15 March 1984,
PV 8077.
17. Interrogat
ion of Raymond D., Brussels judiciary police, 16 March
1984, PV 8079.
18. Interrogat
ion of Nathalie G., Brussels judiciary police, 24 February
1984, PV 7327.
19. Interrogat
ion of Jean Claude J., Brussels judiciary police, 23
February 1984, PV7213.
20. Brussels
judiciary police, February 22, 1984, PV 7115.
21. Interrogat
ion of Pierre S., Brussels judiciary police, 6 December
1985, PV 24930. Pierre S. later emphatically denies that
he was interrogated that day. According to him, this
report is based on his statements on 14 February 1984.
22. Findings
judiciary police Brussels, 14 February 1984, PV 648.
23. Hearing
of Patricia S., Brussels judiciary police, 16 February 1984,
PV 6443.
24. Interview
with Antoinette Van Hees, 23 October 1997.
25. Judiciary
police Brussels, 26 February 1984, PV 4389.
26. Interrogat
ion of Serge S. and Alain Lenglet, a mobile brigade of the
Gendarmerie of Brussels, 26 April 1984, PV 1880.
27. Judiciary
Police Brussels, 22 May 1984, PV 12637.

28. Interrogat
ion Pierre Van Hees, Judiciary Police Brussels, 22 May
1984, PV 12636.
29. Interrogat
ion of Muriel C., Brussels GP, 5 June 1984, PV 12647.
30. Brussels
judiciary police, July 10, 1984, PV 16522.
31. Brussels
judiciary police, 27 July 1984, official report 16516.
32. Interrogat
ion of Marc Duriau, Brussels judiciary police, official
report 16584.
33. Serge
Clooth interview, Brussels judiciary police, 12 September
1984, official report 19850.
34. He
confirmed his statement when Clooth was led before
examining magistrate Eloy on 13 September 1984.
35. Judiciary
police Brussels, 12 September 1984, PV 19602.
36. Interrogat
ion of Muriel C., Brussels judiciary police, 12 September
1984, PV 19853.
37. Interrogat
ion of Serge Clooth, Brussels judiciary police, 15
September 1984, official report 19866.
38. Interrogat
ion Serge Clooth, Brussels judiciary police, 28 September
1984, PV 20693.
39. Analysis
of letters Christine Van Hees, Brussels judiciary police, 6
March 1984, PV 7541.
40. Interrogat
ion of Serge Clooth, Brussels judiciary police, 29
September 1984, PV 20691.
41. Confronta
tion Clooth-Lenglet, Brussels judiciary police, 3 October
1984, PV 21309.
42. Thierry D.
is a witness of the first hour. He stated that Christine Van
Hees had come into contact with an extreme-right youth

gang. Thierry D. is one of the people who will die at a relatively young age.

43. Gendarmerie Kelmis, 20 November 1984, PV 1467.
44. Brussels judiciary police, 26 November 1984, PV 24640.
45. Serge Clooth interrogation, Brussels judiciary police, January 14, 1988, PV 3623.
46. Lenglet and Braeckman had already been released in 1986.
47. The dismissal was declared on 10 October 1990. From that moment on, the 'punk trail' was definitively closed. In addition to Serge Clooth, Alain Lenglet, Renaud Thill, Marc L. (Coco 1), and Alain D.B. (Kleenex) have also been accused for a while. Serge Braeckman has been previously cleared of prosecution.
48. Interrogation of Serge Clooth, Brussels judiciary police, February 10, 1987, PV 4231.
49. Interrogation Pierre Van Hees, Brussels judiciary police, 19 September 1991, PV 40305.
50. Interrogation Michel Van Hees, BOB Brussels, January 19, 1997, PV 100,450.
51. Interrogation Roger B., Brussels judiciary police, 15 April 1991, official report 2858.
52. Brussels judiciary police, 28 May 1984, PV 12639. It was never made clear why this observation was linked at the time to the murder of Christine Van Hees.
53. Brussels judiciary police 8 November 1984, PV 44740.
54. Reconstruction based on the note 'Synthesis of the work I carried out at the antenna- Neufchâteau.' First Sergeant Aimé Bille transmitted this document on 22 September 1997 to Counsel Marique, who was carrying out investigative work for the Verwilghen Commission then.

55. Brussels judiciary police, 22 May 1987, PV 14976. Dolores refers to the manager, Dolores Bara.
56. Interrogation Freddy VD.S., Brussels judiciary police, 23 August 1984, PV 18492.
57. Interrogation of Dominique L., Brussels judiciary police, 22 August 1984, report 18488. L. will be interrogated several times and confronted by the people he accuses.
58. BOB Brussels, 10 April 1997, PV 151.131.
59. Interrogation of Nathalie G., Brussels judiciary police, 14 and 17 April 1992, PV's 22424 and 29488.
60. Nathalie G. repeats this statement when the BOB interrogates her on 20 March 1997. She also insists that the 'secret' between her and Christine is irrelevant to the investigation.
61. Interrogation of Nathalie G., BOB Brussels, 20 March 1997, PV 150.772.
62. Interrogation of Ariane M., Brussels judiciary police March 1986, PV 8274.
63. In one of her letters to the young detainee Pascale Lamarque, Christine Van Hees mentioned a date at the end of 1983 when the unknown para-commando would resume his service. Based on that date and the first name, the De Baets team thought they could find out who he might have been. Before it could come to that, the whole team was dismissed from the investigation.
64. Brussels judiciary police, 23 April 1987, PV 13073.
65. In 1998, after the press reported on the X1 dossier and the Brussels public prosecutor had long since closed the case, Marc Dutroux was again questioned about it. He then suddenly denied ever having been part of a motorcycle gang. He says he only rode a motorcycle for a while in the

- 1970s—interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Brussels, June 11, 1998, PV 151.231.
66. Interrogation Michèle Martin, GP Arlon, December 4, 1996, PV 2.867, added to research file 96/109 of Neufchâteau under the number 118.723.
67. Interrogation Francis H., BOB Brussels, 12 April 1997, PV 151.184. When Marc Dutroux abducted Laetitia Delhez in Bertrix, he also drove around with a van containing a mattress.
68. Brussels judiciary police, 22 February 1984, PV 7114.
69. Interrogation of Philippe Moussadyk, Brussels judiciary police, 27 September 1984, PV 20689.
70. Philippe Moussadyk appears on a personnel list of Radio Activité from 1984. BOB Brussels, 18 April 1997, PV 115.222.
71. Both stations will share the same address for a long time: Keltenlaan 3 in Etterbeek.
72. Interview with Michel Van Hees, BOB Brussel, December 15, 1996, PV 118.632.
73. Interview Paule Somers, De Morgen, May 2, 1998.
74. BOB Charleroi, 13 August 1996, PV 103.313.
75. Brussels BOB, 26 April 1997, PV 151.312.
76. Anonymous testimony, Brussels judiciary police, 20 February 1984, PV 7112.
77. Interrogations of Fabienne K., Brussels judiciary police, 9 and 22 March 1993, PV's 25974 and 25976.
78. BOB Brussels, 25 May 1997, PV. 151.662
79. Interrogation of Didier V, BOB Brussels, 25 May 1997, PV. 151.661.

80. Interrogation of Jean-Pierre G., BOB Brussels, 6 May 1997, PV. 151.404.
81. Interrogation DV, BOB Brussels, 10 May 1997, PV. 151.456.
82. Interrogation Christian V.G., BOB Brussels, 7 May 1997, PV 151.407.
83. Registration number BCD 807, chassis number A733151329.
84. Findings BOB Brussels, June 2 and 4, 1997, PV's 151.797 and 151.859.
85. BOB Brussels, September 10, 1996, PV's 113.508 and 113.509.
86. The detectives of the De Baets team will never have the time to interrogate all 32 persons mentioned in the phone book.
87. A faster interrogation could have been fascinating since Christine Van Nees's parents had never heard of Doctor Hallard: interrogation, Dr Francis Hallard, Brussels judiciary police, 29 December 1988, PV 31.034.
88. The antenna-Neufchâteau does and establishes that it is a student with the former substitute's name.
89. The search yields nothing. Several license plates noted by the judiciary police have never existed. BOB Brussels, 27 March 1997, PV 150,873.
90. BOB Brussels, 24 April 1997, PV 151.165.
91. Investigating judge Jean-Claude Van Espen ordered the BOB officers to interrogate the Judiciary Police officers.
92. Interrogation of Michelle Bogaert, BOB Brussels, 20 May 1997, PV 151.599.
93. BOB Brussels, 27 May 1997, PV 151.678.

7. 'I think I can conclude that the person who described this must have been there.'

Son of the mushroom farm owner, April 14th, 1997

Aurora is a petite and good-humoured Spanish lady. Near Brussels South Station, in the shadow of the pension tower, she serves the best tapas in town. Spanish families who have something to celebrate know the address well. Lonely civil servants enjoy some downtime in her establishment, as do police officers, who have something discreet to discuss. In the first weeks of 1997, this is the late-night meeting place for Adjudant De Baets and some of his colleagues. Their working days start only shortly after Aurora's closing time and end just before they arrive at her place in the evening. It is one of their

few opportunities for R&R, although all conversations usually are about their job. The X1 dossier is of utmost importance; they tell each other.

De Baets lacks the wealth of historical knowledge on the previous legal dossiers, which are now drawing such renewed interest. As principal enquiry leader, holding meetings is his main occupation. He also reads and rereads the interrogation texts of X1 and prepares the service notes of cases that require verification. Only here, in the tapas bar, he hears from his colleagues between pot and pint how even her most implausible-sounding statements always seem to make sense. They can't stop talking about the nail in Christine Van Hees' wrist. X1 did not talk about a nail. She mentioned 'something' that lawyer E. 'drilled into her hands'. This cannot be made up. If there is anything that has never appeared in the press concerning the murder of Christine Van Hees -and no police officer could know or suggest- it is this.

And the tampon. X1 mentioned the tampon only as an irrelevant detail. What did the detectives find in the old file? 'Discovery of bloodstained Tampax in the building where the first fire happened.'

The same court document mentions a hammer, which may have been the object X1 saw Lawyer E. wield that night. It also mentions a rope, which is consistent with what X1 told us. Another inventory from that time further mentions candles and a jerry can.

The mention of a nail, or lack thereof, is debatable. On November 18th, X1 does not speak of a nail but a hollow metal rod, 'thirty centimetres long'. Among the items recovered at the murder scene were two metal rods that matched this description. Everything becomes apparent after a conversation with the son of the former operator of the mushroom farm. The fifty-year-old grew up next to the farm and lived there until 1971. Willingly, he shows old pictures of the farm's infrastructure. Faded prints from the family album show a proud father and uncle holding trays of freshly picked mushrooms. They were the best mushrooms in the country. The photos show the stacked shelves containing the growing mushrooms. Thin metal rods were welded together to prop up

the racks. 'In 1984, there must have been hundreds of those rods lying around there,' says the son. How long were they? Thirty or forty centimetres.

The man experienced sleepless nights in late 1996. He is one of the first outsiders to be confronted with parts of X1's statements on December 23rd. During the interrogation on November 18th, she described a substantial amount of detail about the farm, saying that it should be possible to check with the owner whether she had indeed been at the scene of the crime or not. Some elements, for example, do not appear to be correct, at least not after verification with the descriptions of the places which the police in Auderghem noted down in 1984. The son causes a sensation when the texts are presented to him. 'That policeman has not been inside the house; your witness X1 has', he tells the astonished investigators. The policeman in question, Jacques Dekock, was called in that evening and immediately confronted by the son. The confrontation does not last long. It's true, he has to admit. That night, he was so stunned by the corpse that he barely looked at the building.

The son is not the type of person who is easily confused by room layout descriptions. He is an engineer. He is not so surprised by the account of X1. After his father left, the building came into the possession of a real estate speculator in the mid-1970s who never realised his vision for the place. The habitable rooms were rented out to students, but soon, no one knew who lived there. At the time, stories circulated about sex parties and other 'things that shouldn't see the light of day', the son remembers. Yet that is not the main reason why -until today- he is more convinced than anyone else that X1 is telling the truth. The site was demolished in 1989. No information about what it looked like in 1984 is available anywhere. It was such a complex tangle of houses, cottages, hangars, driveways, corridors and basements that all those trying to guesstimate the interior would immediately be caught out. And that's the bizarre part. The investigators can't figure out X1's disclosure that she arrived there by car, got out, stumbled... The proprietor's son is not surprised by it at all. He can describe exactly which route X1 entered the building and how she reached the basement. That she tripped in the hallway is

logical, he says. More people used to do that. By converting two houses internally into one, an entrance hall had been created with two staircases: first down, then up again, precisely as X1 described it. He considers it entirely feasible that she reached the basement from the living room. 'In fact, she was in the kitchen,' the son deduces from the description of the wallpaper and tiles, which also matches her description perfectly. He talked it over with his family. 'There are things we read in her statements that reminded us of details we had long forgotten, such as the motif on the tiles,' he says later. Indeed, there was a separate corridor to the basement from the kitchen. And the meat hooks? Another detail that only now brings back memories. 'Back then, of course, we also produced charcuterie,' says the son. His uncle made meat pies and set up an industrial kitchen in an annexe. With pen in hand, the son draws the path X1 would have taken on the night of the murder. The rough wooden table, the rain barrel ... Yes, my father had left it there when he left. It is truly astonishing.*1

Aurora, the owner of the tapas restaurant, has no idea what the men in the corner are talking about when she hears one of them shout something about Fabienne K. or the punks' lawyer, who also happened to defend Marc Dutroux in 1989. The Spanish lady shakes her head and sprinkles more Provençal herbs over the mushrooms. She only understood that this whole thing about the mushroom farm had nothing to do with her tapas. Aurora is not the only one who struggles to follow the proceedings. Things are also moving too fast for the Brussels Substitute Paule Somers. The magistrate lives with her husband and children on the outskirts of Brussels. She is rather fond of family tranquillity, especially during the Christmas break. Regardless, on December 30th 1996, the young gendarme recruit Khalifa rang her doorbell. The gendarme carries a sizeable box of reports and a ready-made official request to 're-examine' the Van Hees file. This is required, Khalifa explains, to tap Fabienne K.'s phone, just as his colleague Bille had informed him.

Tapping a phone is an 'active act of investigation' and can only be done by order of an investigating judge. Legally speaking, the file must be re-investigated. Even though agreements have been made beforehand with the national magistrates, Somers

is annoyed by the unannounced visit. She does not feel much like going through the pile of reports now on the spot.

"Haven't you created some sort of summary of what you have been doing all these weeks?" she wants to know. Khalifa has no idea. His superiors only told him to deliver this stack of papers. To Somers, the whole affair resembles that of a door-to-door salesman; "please sign on the dotted line". She sends Khalifa away, saying that she wants to consider her answer.*2

De Baets and his colleagues were so busy at the end of 1996 that it did not occur to any of them to draw up an orderly synthesis of synchronicities between the statements of X1 and the tangible reality of the old dossier, even though by then, these were plentiful. As a response to Somers's question, De Baets, Bille and the chief of the investigation team, Rudy Hoskens, created a three-page report on January 2nd, 1997, in which they gave the main outlines of X1's testimony but failed to clarify why she should be taken seriously.*3

In hindsight, the lack of a proper synthesis may seem like a procedural detail, but it is decisive for how things evolve.

'Prosecutor Bourlet and the national magistrates Duinslaeger and Vandoren were De Baets' main interlocutors at the time,' says an erstwhile colleague. 'They did know the file. At least, they knew what De Baets had told them about it. Now, De Baets made occasional associations. If you trusted his perspective, X1 had effectively talked about a nail in Christine Van Hees' wrist and mentioned razor blades used in the murder of Carine Dellaert. It was always about small things, but when those people later learned it was not exactly what he had told them, they naturally began to doubt him -except Bourlet. The atmosphere was also very different back then. Bourlet was the man of the moment. De Baets lived in the belief that he was accountable only to himself. That was a grave miscalculation.'

De Baets sees it differently: 'Magistrates like nothing better than syntheses. They would like you to summarise three years of research in two A4 sheets if at all possible. Well, I am against that in principle, and not only me. The College of Prosecutors General issued a directive a few years ago prohibiting syntheses as a legal basis because a judicial investigation must be as objective as possible. For this reason,

the X1 investigation is the best and the most proper investigation ever conducted in this country. It was supposed to be a model for how things would be done in the future. I am still proud of that and always will be.'

In early December, X1's interrogations follow each other in rapid succession. On December 9, 10, 11, and 15, she was interrogated four times about what she remembered about Kristien.

- Can you say approximately when you met Kristien?
- Uh, about four months before. I haven't seen her very often, just a few times. I've seen them... she was rather fond of Nihoul.
- Please tell us any places where you may have seen her with Nihoul.
- At his house a few times.
- At his house... Was that in a house or an apartment?
- I suspect an apartment. But I did see her somewhere else. I don't remember exactly. We went out to dinner about twice, and she was there. (silence) I'm difficult to make contact with, so (...).
- Yes, how did Kristien get there?
- She rode her bike there.*4

If X1 got to know Christine Van Hees four months before her death, that would be in mid-October 1983. According to her friends, the old file shows that that is the period when she started to behave differently. After the summer vacation, she no longer went to the scouts but pretended to do so to her parents. X1 did not like the newcomer very much, she explained during the interrogation on December 9th. She had to 'train her up' and felt very little motivation for that, it is said.

- I thought it was so foolish that from the beginning, she was... so naive... I was already at a certain level; I didn't give a damn about teaching her or what I had to show her if she please let me in peace.... as long as she didn't whine about how much she liked him, about how sweet and pleasant he was...

- When Kristien arrives by bicycle at that apartment or flat, is she coming from school or somewhere else?
- I don't know; I think she's coming from school.
- Don't you hear them saying, "I'm coming from there now, or I have to go there now, or..."
- (nods no) I'm not interested, so I... Well, I... It's difficult, isn't it?
- Is it?
- If I'd known it was so important, I might have tried harder to listen; I do remember that. I know she... I know she was really into him... when she came in, she'd immediately hug him and stuff like that. And usually, she couldn't stay that long, probably because she was hiding the relationship from her parents, I guess.

Far from all the details released by X1 that day are confirmed. She states that Kristien liked U2 and George Michael as her favourite music. Christine's mother mentions another genre: Richard Clayderman and Michel Fugain.*5 During her tenth interrogation, X1 talks about a sex party in a large villa on the outskirts of Brussels, where she saw both 'Kristien' and lawyer E. again. She situates this event 'three to four weeks' before the murder. If correct, it coincides precisely with the period in which Christine Van Hees stayed away from school for an entire week without her parent's knowledge.

During the eleventh interrogation, on December 10th, X1 is asked to present an overview of the sex parties she met 'Kristien'. Apart from a few afternoons at an apartment, where the proceedings were relatively innocent, there were only three occasions. 'Kristien' and herself were not the only victims, she says. The first party took place in a villa on the outskirts of Brussels. Among the girls were a certain Belinda and a Marie-Thérèse, whom everyone called Mieke.

- Who was Marie-Thérèse?
- A French-speaking girl, uh... about sixteen years old...*6

She knows about Mieke that she was killed later, presumably in November 1984. That happened in Knokke, X1 claims. With regard to the participants at the first of three sex parties, she names the Flemish industrialists Y and W, lawyer E., Annie

Bouty, Michel Nihoul, Tony and a dog trader from Mechelen. She specifically remembered the large swimming pool and an impressive collection of model boats displayed throughout the villa. The children were forced to watch a kind of snuff film, which X1 claims featured two infants she had given birth to and were being tortured in the movie. The purpose of the first night was an initiation. The adults wore SM clothes and slaughtered a goat and two rabbits in front of the undressed, tied-up children.

According to X1, the whole ritual had nothing to do with Satanism and even less to do with bizarre sexual preferences among the adults - 'they hated this'- but everything to do with a sophisticated method of conditioning the children and preventing any of them from ever talking. After all, stories about slaughtered goats, rabbits and men in black leather suits are easily dismissed as fantastical stories. However, with 'Kristien', things went completely wrong, says X1. She kept resisting and refused to accept what happened to her. X1 and Mieke, who had to force her to eat the heart of the recently slaughtered rabbit, tried to silence her, unsuccessfully. She later explains that rejecting all those conditions would cost 'Kristien' her life. 'It was that which made me so angry,' X1 sighs at some point in a long monologue. 'I have always felt responsible for that. So, I also preferred girls or boys who were initiated, knew what to do, and knew the codes of conduct. And Kristien was already too old. She had missed a significant period of sexual abuse, so to speak.'

According to X1, the adults had drugged 'Kristien' for the so-called initiation or at least got her drunk. If that had not been the case, she might have reacted more consciously afterwards. That was the result: 'Kristien' tried to act as if nothing had happened. 'Not knowing more or not wanting to know more, I leave that in the middle', says X1. 'She had repressed the experience, you see?'

The third sex party took place in a riding school near Brussels. It was a party with a select few participants held shortly before her death. It is in this part of the testimony that X1 talks for the first time in clear terms about the motive for the murder. 'I saw it coming, that it would go on because I know

that when girls start to make trouble or when things don't go well or went smoothly enough... Then those girls usually disappeared.' Although she avoids 'Kristien' herself as much as possible and hardly talks to her, X1 thinks she can understand why the girl did not raise the alarm in the last days of her life. She assumes that Kristien went through the same thing as herself as a child.

"You can't relinquish that secret. Many, many victims can't tell that secret. They don't dare say it, and what would they have said...especially in Kristien's case. What should she have said? Like, I'm being raped by a guy who could be my father? Then everything would have... she'd have lost her freedom; she'd have been removed from her home... I know all those things because those were just the reasons why I kept quiet. If you tell, would anyone believe you? You don't know that (...). Most friends wouldn't have known she was with an older guy. She would have said that she had a lover, but probably not of that age (...). Even more so because they say they do it for love. They do it for you, so to speak; they tell you that adults make love this way, adults have sex this way, so if you want to be with us, if you don't want to lose us, then you have to do it this way."

Before the interrogation on December 11th, Danny De Pauw and a colleague took X1 for a stroll in the Brussels periphery. At Oppem-Meise, she suddenly recognises the road and relates the surroundings to 'the riding school' she mentioned the day before. She fails to point out the exact route. She notes that the area has been considerably remodelled since she came here. From where X1 could have drawn that recollection if not from her memory, is unknown. The fact is that Michel Nihoul once kept a horse there. The driver of the former prime minister, about whom she spoke several times, also had a horse here. The riding school, it later emerged, opened its doors in 1983 and closed in 1986. In 1989, the school was taken over by other owners. Since 1984, many houses have been built around the riding school, as was confirmed by the local police of Meise.*7

Since she had put her faith in De Baets, X1 had started to adjust her day-to-day routine to the investigation. After a

gruelling night in the interrogation room, she often had to start working in the dog grooming salon straight away when she arrived home in Ghent. She sometimes skips two nights of sleep. X1 testifies, so to speak, until she drops -which also happens. The twelfth interrogation does the investigation more harm than good. X1 begins to talk unsolicited about her little son Tiu and has the irrepressible tendency to connect his death with the murder of 'Kristien'. Tiu, she says, was born at the beginning of September 1983. Only her parents and a cousin knew about it. The child was six months old when lawyer E. murdered it in the riding school.*8

X1 reveals all she can remember about these events during the last interview of 1996. It is already December 15th. If Adjutant De Baets had wanted to at that stage, he could have brought up the old Van Hees dossier, giving X1 some direction and information that would quickly make her realise that she is mixing up all kinds of events. The result of the thirteenth interrogation will be eagerly exploited at a later stage to put an end to the X1 investigations. She recounts her greatest tragedy that night. Tiu, she says, was murdered in the riding school a few hours before 'Kristien'. The murder of her baby was punishment for her failure to initiate the new girl properly. E. cut off the baby's testicles under her eyes. Then, they slew the child with a hammer and a knife. In the end, X1 had her face pushed into the bloody remains. She was then forced to throw the child into a garbage bag.*9

When magistrates declare later that 'the facts and dates given by X1 cannot be correct', they mean in the first place that it is impossible that the murder of Christine Van Hees was preceded by another lugubrious weekend in a riding school in Oppem-Meise. The materially verifiable reality of the 1984 dossier is the following: Christine Van Hees came back from a school trip on Saturday, stayed with her parents for almost the entire weekend, and played truant in the morning of Monday, February 13th, 1984, but was back at school that afternoon.

X1 later states that she was 'very wrong' during the December 12 and 15 hearings. 'I know that now,' she says. 'But at the time, that was the first time I talked to anyone about Tiu. That whole period, early 1984, is a total blur for me. I simply cannot

separate that into days and hours. It was the same period. It could have been a week earlier or two weeks. I don't remember. Then, after what they had done to Tiu, I was living like a zombie.*10

The BOB officer with the sharpest perspective on the Christine Van Hees dossier is Aimé Bille. When, in early 1997, the initial doubts and questions were raised about the credibility of X1, he invariably fell back on his favourite dossier: 'We don't need X1 to solve this case. In those days, Bille listened to what people told him about the testimony with an almost absent gaze and nods. 'It's true, yes, it's true.' Or: 'I already knew that.' Bille is in the same boat as his colleague De Baets. If there is one thing he cannot do, it is to summarise the dossier. Up to three times, he will be asked to summarise his findings. Each time, this will result in an even longer and more exhaustive enumeration of facts, dates, names and police numbers. Few, for instance, will understand what he is talking about when Bille implores his colleagues that the search for "Nathalie P's trail" must be continued.

Nathalie P is a young female who, at the end of 1996, surprisingly talks freely to the BOB about Michel Nihoul, whom she knew at the time of Radio Activité, where she worked as a volunteer in her youth. She says that Nihoul often bragged about his excellent contacts at the Brussels judiciary police and with former Prime Minister Paul Vanden Boeynants. In café Les Bouffons, the regular café of the Radio Activité crew, she once met top gangster Patrick Haemers.*11

It is perhaps a coincidence, but Nathalie P had already aroused the interest of Neufchâteau before they found out that her name also appears in the old Van Hees file in a very intriguing way.*12 One week after the event of the murder, on February 21st 1984, between 10.10 and 10.30 p.m., the police of Auderghem noticed a mysterious car from which four people seemed to be observing the ruins of the old mushroom farm. When the driver noticed the police, he immediately drove off at full speed, only to return four minutes later and take off again.*13 One officer described a Honda Civic with license plate CXP 398. The judiciary police officers in charge of the investigation considered this a significant lead at the time -

criminals always return to the crime scene- and spent an entire day looking for the driver. They found him the same night at 3:30 a.m. The man explained that he had 'just gone to take a look' at the murder scene. He also said that he was accompanied by two friends and the fiancée of one of them, Nathalie P.*14. All four occupants, it later emerged, worked for Radio Activité. All four were acquaintances of Michel Nihoul.

When the antenna-Neufchâteau is finally given the go-ahead to tap the telephone lines of Fabienne K., it is immediately apparent that Nathalie P. is calling her on her cell phone.*15 Fabienne K. was the girl with whom Christine Van Hees took the bus and to whom she told what had happened to her within a group which engaged in group sex. In contrast to the old murder file, the investigators could now establish that Fabienne K. and Nathalie P. knew each other. The investigators learnt in mid-1997 about Nathalie P. that an investigation had been opened against her at the Brussels public prosecutor's office because of sexual offences. Until 1994, she worked in a bar with a swimming pool in Tervuren, where sex parties regularly took place. The investigation never got any further than this. Before the case against Nathalie P. can be opened, the detectives who were assisting Adjutant De Baets are removed from the investigation.

'I dare to say that the X1 trail has been fully explored,' says Paule Somers in an interview early in 1999.*16 It seems that Somers never found the time to read her dossier even after December 30th, 1996. Nathalie P was never questioned again. No further investigation was ever carried out into the bar in Tervuren. There was a reason to do so: to get some insight into the relevance of the statements of X1. The establishment was run in the early 1980s by a former representative of one of the companies a prominent figure X1 spoke about. The bar still exists today -albeit under a different name- and prompts older Tervuren residents to tell juicy stories about screaming women, gratuitous sex and police interventions that ended up nowhere. It is one of those places in Brussels where wealthy Eurocrats and NATO officials like to be 'pampered'. On the upper floors are private apartments, one of which was rented for years by one of the sons of former Zairean President Mobutu. The authors met a woman who -unaware of any

connection to the X1 story- says that as a young teenager in the Tervuren bar, she was loaned out by her father to other men during sex parties.

At the end of September 1996, long before X1 pronounced the name `Kristien' for the first time, a witness came forward at the Brussels police station who stated that Nihoul, as the boss of the commercial broadcasting station Radio Activité, liked to organise evenings where young people could get to know the budding stars of the chanson world. Initially, these parties, which attracted many minors, took place on the premises of Radio Activité itself, but later also in the municipal hall De Gerlache in Etterbeek and the castle Faulx-les-Tombes. 'These evenings quickly degenerated into sex parties at which the organisers - Nihoul and his entourage - cared little about the presence of the participants,' the witness explains. 'The recruitment, fuelled by alcohol, took place during those evenings of Radio Activité.'¹⁸.

One Saturday morning, shortly before her death, Christine Van Hees urged her mother to participate in a quiz on a local station called Radio Cinquantenaire, mother Van Hees seems to remember. The prizes were not very tempting - free lamb chops at the butchers around the corner. So, her mother didn't call after all, much to her daughter's disappointment. Christine insisted, saying she knew the answers with one hundred per cent certainty but could not or would not call herself.¹⁹

Eric B was a deejay with a sense of order. He prepared the quiz questions well in advance and kept them with him in a small briefcase. He ensured no one could see the questions and answers before the broadcast. At the beginning of 1984 - he does not remember the exact date -his bag was stolen from his car, which was a minor disaster for him. The following Saturday, he managed to get by with the questions as he remembered them primarily by heart. Did Christine Van Hees obtain the answers from the thief? Could this be a lead to her 'bad friends'? It seems a logical deduction, although her mother speaks very emphatically of Radio Cinquantenaire, not Radio Activité, where Eric B worked at the time. However, if she had confused these two radio stations, this is not a

surprise. They were closely related in the early 1980s, shared the same radio wavelength and address at one point, and had a relatively high turnover of employees between them. There was even talk of a merger for a while.

When Bille questions Eric B. at the end of April 1997, it appears that he still remembers the theft of his bag of quiz questions. He had always suspected that "someone from Radio Activité" had stolen the bag. He deduced this from the fact that, shortly after the theft, a certain employee told him he had noticed the bag in a vacant lot next to the Thieffry metro station. B. remembers the employee's name, namely Dominique L.*20. The attentive reader may remember him: he was the man who encouraged the detectives to follow the punk trail. This man was also connected to Michel Nihoul through Radio Activité, Faulx-les-Tombes, and the Etterbeek Hall De Gerlache parties. According to a witness, Dominique L was also a doorman in The Dolo. Once again, this lead was never further investigated after the removal of the De Baets team.

Michel Forgeot, the owner of the Dolo and other sex clubs he operated in Etterbeek's Atrebatenstraat in the 1980s, one of the regular customers in The Dolo and his other clubs, was judiciary police commissioner Guy Collignon. He is the policeman who came to pick up Christine Van Hees' brother from school and announced that the murder would probably never be solved because it involved 'important people'.*21. This information can also be found in the reports drawn up by De Baets' colleagues in early 1997.

The detectives around De Baets have not discovered the whole picture by a long shot. Anyone who takes the time to delve a little into the dossier will encounter even more sinister coincidences. The following is based entirely on legal documents composed for the benefit of the magistrates in the Dutroux case and other related files. These are not documents from a different cabinet but were found in the same one. They only needed to be read to understand that X1 is not alone when she connects the murder of Christine Van Hees to the milieu surrounding Michel Nihoul and Annie Bouty. This time, it is not a witness who claims this nor a haphazardly suggested

connection. The objective ally of X1 is the Belgian Secret Service, no less.

It is frankly astounding. On March 24th, 1997, State Security Administrator Bart Van Lijsebeth sent an eight-page memo to Prosecutor Bourlet and the national magistrates Vandoren, Duinslaeger and Van Heers. In the preceding months, Van Lijsebeth had already expressed his resentment because Neufchâteau was hitting close to the mark of the info previously gathered by the Secret Service about cult activity. The memo -under the always exciting heading of 'confidential'- describes how State Security had begun to take an interest in the Celestian Church of Christ sect led by Annie Bouty, a link in the network of small companies and non-profit organisations through which Annie Bouty was trafficking human beings between Belgium and several African states. Van Lijsebeth says another association was the non-profit organisation Asetanas, located at Rue du Trône 14, on the border between Brussels and Ixelles. According to its statutes, the non-profit organisation promoted the interests of African students in Belgium. The founding members are Claude Michel (president), Georges Bouty (secretary) and Claude Ceresa (treasurer). The exciting thing about this non-profit organisation, says Van Lijsebeth, is that each member is in close contact with Nihoul and Bouty, whose brother is Georges. Moreover, this entire group is among the regulars of the Brussels bar The Coco Beach, operated by a former mistress of the late Patrick Haemers.

Van Lijsebeth does not specify what could conceivably be criminal about that. From his note, it is clear that he does not want to do more than point out the connections between the individuals mentioned in his report. That is why he added a list of people who should be counted among the 'Bouty-Nihoul' circle according to the State Security. Van Lijsebeth quotes seven names: Georges Bouty, Claude Ceresa, Agim Memedov, Pascal Lamarque, Marie-Claire De Gieter, Max Slot and Joseph De Gieter. For each of these seven, the boss of State Security provides a long and complete list of their judicial history. Concerning Claude Ceresa -who has since had his name changed- he can state that this is a homosexual with a series of convictions for all kinds of illegal activities and fraudulent

bankruptcy. Pascal Lamarque's name appears on the list because he lived with Ceresa from 1984 to 1990. He was born in 1964. His criminal record is noticeably longer: eleven convictions between August 1983 and September 1995. Lamarque has just about performed every crime imaginable: thefts with violence, rapes of minors, drug trafficking, car thefts, beatings and injuries, defamation of an officer, hit-and-run after an accident, damage to monuments...^{*22} Michel Lelièvre was not the only morally suspect friend of Michel Nihoul.

Unlikely as this may sound, no investigator or magistrate has yet noticed the connection despite more than a year of 'exhaustive investigation'. Pascal Lamarque is none other than the young man with whom Christine Van Hees corresponded during the last months of her life and with whom she shared several secrets. It is to him that Christine Van Hees wrote on December 20th, 1983, less than two months before her death, that she wants to run away from home and drastically change her lifestyle: 'I beg you, don't ask me where. Don't ask me why, and even less why I can't write anymore.' And a little later: 'I experienced a miserable Christmas and a sad New Year. But between the two, it was great because I met the love of my life.'

Shortly after the murder, the Brussels judiciary police obtained nine letters from Pascal Lamarque to Christine Van Hees and four in the opposite direction.^{*23} There must have been more letters, especially from Christine Van Hees to Lamarque. It seems clear that the two met only once, on the train in Soignies, at the end of 1983. Lamarque declares this afterwards; Christine Van Hees also writes this in one of her letters. The letters call into question a lot of earlier "certainties" in the judicial file. Pierre S., the boy Christine Van Hees described to her parents and friends as her regular boyfriend, she labels in one of the letters, somewhat humiliating, as her 'holiday lover'. The tone is and remains surprisingly confidential, as is evident from a letter in which Christine Van Hees alludes to an unspecified crime of which Lamarque is accused, of which he insists he is innocent but has decided to take the blame. 'I don't understand how you can't prove that you weren't there at the time of the crime.'

After all, you had told me that you were meeting with some friends at the time?'

The fact that Christine Van Hees corresponds with a young criminal targeted by State Security as a member of the 'Nihoul circle' can, of course, be a coincidence. However, the affair turns surreal when it appears that, at the beginning of 1998, the Brussels court proclaims with much fanfare that 'everything' has been investigated and that it is certain that there is 'no connection whatsoever' between the circle of friends of Christine Van Hees and the individuals quoted by X1.

At the end of 1998, we contacted Pascal Lamarque on the phone. He was again in prison. He could not have committed the murder, he said, because in February 1984, he was also in jail. He did know Michel Nihoul at the time, and it seems pretty apparent that Christine Van Hees must have bumped into him at Radio Activité... He also let it be known that he was never interrogated after the Dutroux case.

The X1 investigators also never connected the memorandum of State Security to Christine Van Hees's letters. The question is whether they could. The note reached Bourlet on March 24th, 1997, when the atmosphere within the antenna-Neufchâteau was already reaching fever pitch.*24 Van Lijsebeth probably never knew either since he had no access to the Van Hees file. He could only participate constructively and provide the information he had. And that is what he did.

De Baets and his colleagues do not need Pascal Lamarque to conclude that X1 must have been present at the murder. At the beginning of April, they both had another meeting with the son of the former manager of the mushroom farm.*25 They now confront the man with all the statements that X1 ever made about the building during her interrogations. They have printed out all the location descriptions. The son is now allowed to take the entire bundle home and is given time to study the information and present it to his brother, sisters and wife. All have lived in the building, and they remember every nook and cranny. The second test does not change the son's initial findings; quite the contrary.

The family was unanimous, he announced on April 14th, 1997. Aware of the great importance of this investigation, they all sat around the table as if they were an examining board. They are amazed. From X1's statements, they extracted twelve specific items about which there can be no dispute that they were present in the old building. 'These items are sometimes poorly situated, but they correspond to reality,' says the son. Among other things, he talks about the drawing X1 made of a door during an interrogation. That looked precisely as X1 drew it. The other points are even more impressive: location and view of the tiled courtyard, the glass walls (at the bottom in wood, at the top in glass), the rooms with windows with rose motif, the room with arched ceiling, location and view of the grey-brown marble chimney wall (X1 also copied it to perfection), various stairs that made the house inside so specific, the sink and small window in the laundry room, location of the stairs to the second floor, location and view of the central fuse box, high window in the kitchen, the route X1 says she took inside to reach the basement. Already, these are not vague details that are open to multiple interpretations. The family thinks they can understand why X1 remembers all these things so clearly. If she has been in the building only once, that can only mean that she experienced something particularly traumatic. At the end of his interrogation, the manager's son concludes: 'I think I can conclude that the person who described this must indeed have been in the house at some point.'

NOTES:

1. After X1's first series of statements about the old mushroom farm, the son of the manager, who lived there until 1971 and continued to visit regularly after that, was interrogated twice. BOB Brussels, December 23rd 1996 and January 21st 1997, PV's 119,120 and 101,019. The authors had a conversation with him on April 28th 1999.
2. Somers later describes the gendarme's visit in a note (incidentally, she quotes the wrong gendarme as an uninvited visitor). According to Somers, De Baets, and First Sergeant Bille made it known during a prior telephone conversation that it would be good to

`investigate the case now' because the investigating judge on duty on December 30th, 1996 is Anne Gruwez. She is a magistrate with whom De Baets has had a close relationship of mutual trust for years. Somers discerns a manoeuvre to sideline examining magistrate Van Espen, the former investigation leader and indicates that she did not want to be used in a 'slander campaign' against Van Espen. This magistrate is at that moment, as will appear later, himself mentioned in several side files of the Dutroux case. Note from Paule Somers to public prosecutor Benoit Dejemeppe, July 22nd 1997.

3. BOB Brussels, January 2, 1997, 100,053.
4. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, December 9th, 1996, PV 118.728. The passages reproduced come from the integral Dutch transcription of the video recording.
5. Interrogation Antoinette Vanhoucke, BOB Brussels, December 11th, 1996, PV 118.323.
6. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, December 10, 1996, PV 118.727. The passages reproduced come from the integral Dutch transcription of the video recording.
7. BOB Brussels, April 4, 1997, PV 150.759.
8. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, December 11th, 1996, PV 119127.
9. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, December 15th, 1996, PV 118454.
10. Interview with Regina Louf, June 20th 1998.
11. Interrogation Nathalie P, BOB Brussels, December 20th, 1996, PV 119.130.
12. Nathalie P was already questioned in mid-December 1996, not about the Van Hees case, but about Michel Nihoul. BOB Brussels, December 11th, 1996, PV 118.412.
13. Police Oudergem, February 21, 1984, 23.40 hours, PV 5050.
14. Interrogation Bruno K., Brussels judiciary police, February 22nd, 1984, PV 7066.
15. BOB Brussels, 21 May 1997, PV 151.514.

16. Humo,
January 19th 1999.
17. BOB
Brussels, 26 September 1996, PV 114.226.
18. This
interrogation was later fiercely criticised by Chief
Superintendent Philippe Pourbaix, an investigator with
the antenna-Neufchâteau and a close friend of Virginie
Baranyanka, Michel Nihoul's lawyer. This BOB official
said it was not about one anonymous witness but a
mixture of two anonymous witnesses 'assumptions and
deductions. Note from Philippe Pourbaix to the
commander of the Brussels BOB, March 30th, 1998.
19. Interrogat
ion Antoinette Vanhoucke, BOB Brussels, December 11th,
1996, PV 118.323.
20. Interrogat
ion Eric B., BOB Brussels, April 29th 1997, PV 151.355.
21. Interrogat
ion of Michel Forgeot, BOB Brussels, December 30th
1996, PV 119.249.
22. Confidenti
al memorandum, Administrator General Bart Van
Lijsebeth, State Security, March 24th 1997.
23. Brussels
judiciary police, March 3rd 1984, PV 7536. The letters
were filed with the Brussels Registry under 3467/84.
24. Of course,
the authors checked the date, place of birth, and
addresses to see whether this was Pascal Lamarque. It is
the same person. By the way, the person concerned
confirmed this with the authors.
25. One of the
two BOB officers who took an interest in this part of the
investigation was the last person who could be suspected
of having tried to influence the son. This is Chief
Superintendent Danny De Pauw, who will convert to the
'other camp' in the summer of 1997 and, for this reason,
will not be removed from the X1-investigations. He will
later point out that this description of X1 has always
remained a mystery to him.

26. Interrogat
ion of the son of the former manager, BOB Brussels, April
14th 1997, PV 150.360

8. 'The Gendarmerie leadership was eager to dismantle a large paedophilia network, but preferably one without gendarmes in it.'

Adjutant Patriek De Baets, 21st of December 1998

The Neufchâteau cell was formed in November 1996 and staffed by an independent, nearly fifty-man detective team in an isolated modern office building; top secrecy was vital. It was an uninviting place with white, bare walls and a cold

atmosphere. The surroundings are new, but so is one of the interrogators. Philippe Hupez, who undertook the first eight interrogations with De Baets, did not join the new cell. Before the Dutroux case, his focus was on several financial dossiers. He preferred to conclude those but asked X1 for her blessing first. She regretted his leaving the ongoing investigation, but as she was still confident that the case named after her would become a landmark moment in Belgian justice, she had accepted his departure without question. Chief Warrant Officer Danny De Pauw became the new chief interrogator. He only learned of X1's existence for the first time a few days earlier and barely grasped what he was getting into. On his first day on the job, he found himself a passenger in an unmarked police car on a trip to Ghent, where they picked up X1. 'She will try to recall the location of the dwelling where Clo died,' is all the info a bewildered De Pauw received that day. X1 directs the two BOB officers onto the regional road to the town of Eeklo and motions just before entering the village of Waarschoot: 'Here, to the right. She leads them via a winding country road to the house she mentioned during the interrogation on the 25th of October.

The events unfold rather too quickly for De Pauw. Earlier that day, De Baets had tasked him to retrieve forty random pictures of ex-gendarmes from the archives and some photos of a few specific names. De Pauw was to mix these individual random portraits with the named ones to test X1's ability to identify the correct named individuals. De Baets, it turns out, 'wants to gauge her reaction when he confronts her with the most recent information from the investigation into the infamous Nivelles (or 'Nijvel') Gang, which made a bit of a revival in those days.

Eight days before, on the 22nd of November 1996, lawyers Michel Graindorge and Xavier Magnée held a major press conference in Charleroi. Because they represent the families of some of the victims, they had gained access to the mountain of paperwork that the Gang dossier had become. They now speak of an 'extreme right-wing network that attempted to destabilise the country between 1975 and 1985 and thus prepped for a coup d'état'. The lawyers found about twenty names in the file of (former) gendarmes who they believe were involved in, or at least know the motives of, the gangsters who

left at least 29 corpses during brutal shootings and raids on department stores in the first half of the 1980s. The lawyers' list of names includes some old acquaintances, such as Madani Bouhouche and Robert Beijer, as well as Christian Amory and Martial Lekeu. New names are those of former General Beaurir, who happened to have died shortly before, Colonel Mayerus, who had died earlier, and lesser-known names like Poncelet, Marbaix, Depaus, Gombert, Mievis, Maquet, Pattyn, Trotsaert, Galetta, Fievez, Fastrez, Lhost, Tchang and Grigniez.*1.

De Baets worked methodically that day. He intends to save the picture round for last. First, he tries to get more info about 'Clo' from X1, who dutifully attempts to depict the final months of Clo's life. She had a boyfriend somewhere in Ghent with whom she stayed overnight now and then, X1 knows. She knows little about 'Clo's' family. Judging by what X1 tells us, her friend did not stay home much in that period. One small detail makes the investigators' ears prick up: 'She didn't say anything about her mother, but her father... that's a sensitive subject, indeed.'

Danny De Pauw listened intently, asking no questions. That same afternoon, he experienced something rather bizarre. Before starting the interrogation, he and a colleague -not De Baets- took X1 for a car journey, she in the back seat. They intended for her to lead them to 'the factory', which she had already alluded to in a previous interrogation. She then talked about a clandestine studio where snuff movies were produced. De Pauw could not believe his eyes. On the E40 Brussels-Liège motorway, she had indicated the Sterrebeek exit. She subsequently directed the detectives to drive on until they reached a crossroads. 'Left here,' she said. A few kilometres ahead, she asked the driver to halt. That was it, 'the factory'. De Pauw looked at a large sign of the name of the company name owned by a business associate of a politician named by X1. This particular company had once made the news in connection of an investigation into bribery involving a large government order and a network of call girls. It may surprise Detective De Pauw but his colleagues a little less so. Nathalie W, another X-witness, has spoken during her interrogations about a guy who closely approximated a description provided

by an ex-prostitute in the eighties as one of the regular attendees at sex parties with prominent people, among others, in villas in Knokke. Such parties were exposed in the Dutroux and the Pink Ballets court cases. For De Baets and his team, there is already little doubt. 'There is a clear connection.' X1 glanced disdainfully at the business premises from inside the car. 'It has changed', she remarked, referring to a part of the building complex that appeared to have been sublet to another company several years ago. The description she had provided of 'the factory' during the interrogation on the 31st of October also accurately described this place.

During the interrogation on the 30th of November, the detectives raise the subject of the Nijvel Gang. X1 describes the BMW: 'darkened windows through which you could look from the inside to the outside, but not the other way around' - and immediately leads De Baets to suspect that this had to be the kind of car the Group Dyane drove. This Group Dyane, a combat unit within the Gendarmerie, has always been the focal point in the extreme-right conspiracy investigation.*2 One reason for this was that years earlier, a daring arms robbery took place on a Group Dyane barracks, a crime that was never solved. Sometime later, however, some stolen weapons somehow illegitimately found their way into the hands of gendarmes Madani Bouhouche and Robert Beijer. Both were still in active service with the Brussels BOB during that period. Bouhouche assisted with the investigation into crimes he was later suspected of being involved with and was able, for instance, to falsify ballistic expert assessments to his advantage.

De Baets does not arrive at his suspicion lightly. At the onset of the investigation, the detectives came across a short, intriguing passage in X1's private writings. In a notebook written in September 1996, she wrote about 'a gendarme' who raped her while holding a pistol against her head.*3 He always wore dark brown sunglasses. A cursory reading of X1's statements would make many people think of the most clichéd villain from an American TV series. De Baets' thoughts turn to Madani Bouhouche. That evening, he puts his theory to the test.

- Can you look closely at the series of photos and tell me who you recognise in these photos?
- (X1 looks at the photos)
- Do you know the people in these photographs? - (nods yes)
- Are there some faces you recognise, and if so, are any of them linked to the BMW or the (snuff movie) factory? Can you put them aside? You mustn't be afraid of them. They are not going to hurt you.
- (X1 looks at the pictures without saying anything)
- Are you alright?
- Hmm. I have to put them to one side, right?
- Yes
- Oh, my god.
- Either you point them out, and we'll put them aside, or you put them aside.
- Gee...pfff (X1 points at a photo)
- This one?
- This one.
- Well. Take them. These?
- (X1 nods yes)
- Photo 41.
- (points to a second picture) This one.
- Which one?
- This one.

Even when not presenting a broad account of the endless dialogue that follows, the reader will have understood by now how these interviews usually unfolded. The shuffling of photographs, repeatedly followed by encouraging words from the interviewer - 'you mustn't be afraid' - lasts until ten past eleven in the evening. In the end, X1 has pointed out eight pictures. When De Baets and De Pauw look over the results that night, they are speechless. Photos 28 and 18 showed images of Bouhouche and Amory that had never appeared in the press. Photos 2 and 4, which she also pointed out, showed the faces of former gendarmerie colonels René Mayerus and Gérard Lhost. Although those two names also feature on the list of names known by the lawyers involved in the Nijvel Gang inquiry, only a few seasoned investigators would be able to recognise their faces.

On May 12th 1997, half a year after the interrogation of X1, Lhost was summoned to appear before the Gang Commission-bis. They interrogated him about the investigation into the daring arms robbery at the Group Dyane, which he was in charge of at the time in January 1982. Many commission members had their hunches confirmed that day: Lhost had done everything to manoeuvre the investigation away from several obvious red flags that some gendarmes were active in extreme-right terrorist groups such as Westland New Post or the Front de la Jeunesse. It is precisely in these right-wing spheres that the Gang theories are situated, and now, at least partly, the X1 story.

After Lhost left the Gendarmerie at the end of 1985, he joined the security service of the European Union in Brussels. At that time, this became a refuge for discredited extreme-right elements in the Belgian police forces. Lhost had Pierre Eveillard as a colleague, a former cabinet member of Paul Vanden Boeynants and one of the most frequently mentioned regulars of the sex club The Dolo. René Mayerus, a close friend of Bouhouche and the late Westland New Post leader Latinus and co-founder of the Group Dyane, also found himself in identical spheres. Mayerus brought the French right-wing extremist Jean-Francis Ferrari-Calmette into the Gendarmerie in the 1970s to train his men. Calmette also trained selected members from Westland New Post and Front de la Jeunesse. There is another strange coincidence in the photos pointed out by X1. One of the designated individuals used to be a driver for a team run by Lhost that used heavy-duty BMWs.

Some of the characters designated by X1 are truly obscure gendarmes. Photo 22 shows JD, born in 1936 and was never associated with the Gang or any extreme-right affiliations by any media source. His image ended up in the pile purely by chance. Photo 41 also shows a completely unknown individual. It is MH, born in 1939 and never mentioned in the press. This photo, however, was not added to the set by chance. De Baets requested it after he heard a vague story about a murder in Leuven that was supposedly related to blackmail linked to sex parties in which this MH 'had some involvement'.

To X1, this evening is no different than on previous occasions. The interviewers weave intriguing elements with red herrings to test the consistency of her testimony. Photos 24 and 29 showed no gendarmes at all. They were the portraits of two insignificant criminals that Danny De Pauw added to the stack to arrive at a round number of forty. The two men appear to have been born in 1976, are thus seven years younger than X1 herself and can't have played any significant role in the criminal network from the eighties she described. X1 had come up with quite a story about one of them, claiming he served as one of the "watchdogs" during the sex parties.

X1 identifies Madani Bouhouche as the ultra-violent driver of the BMW that took her to 'the factory' and Christian Amory as a kind of slave driver who led her and her peers to record studios or parks where older affluent gentlemen could fire their guns at fleeing children. One of the colonels belonged to that group, says X1. Her account of this kind of human game hunting, which some of the other witnesses X2, X3, X4 and Nathalie W would later talk about, is by far the most controversial part of her testimony. For many, the verbatim transcript of X1's interrogations constitutes the most outlandish part of the entire investigation - even though she speaks about it only occasionally and with palpable reluctance.

- So basically, they let you loose on a large domain or some terrain?
- Yes.
- And then they had to catch you?
- Yes.
- And then what happened?
- We almost ended up against a wall, like a stag's head; that's what happened.
- Oh really?
- Yeah. Then... it was party time.
- What?
- Then there was a party.
- Then there was a party? You claim they catch you, and then it's party time? No, but... We can't go on like this. You're not explaining anything to us.
- No, but...
- It's unproductive for us to go on like this.

- Yes, then they could... they could... do whatever they wanted with us. Whoever could catch us... could do anything. Rape, torture...
- Can you tell us in two words what it was about?
- They also killed girls there.
- Killed girls?
- Yes, they shot them.
- They shot them? With what?
- I didn't ask them.
- No, but did you see it?
- With a weapon, I suppose. Certainly not with a bow and arrow.*4

At the end of the interrogation, still that of the 30th of November, the interrogators De Baets and De Pauw focussed on the birthdates of the two non-gendarmerie officers included in the list of 40 pictures: 1976. Many months later, in a note (eagerly quoted by the press), De Pauw states that De Baets preferred to withhold this information. De Baets, for his part, maintains that it was the other way round and that I 'would have been very close to giving De Pauw a dressing-down when I noticed that he wanted to withhold the birthdates in his official report.'*5 According to De Baets, it was evident that X1 was 'regularly mixing things up', and one had to consider that the two young men might turn up again in another part of the investigation.

In his memo, which will also give rise to a sweeping change of course in the X1 investigations, De Pauw makes further accusations against his former superior officer. In the heydays of the investigation, he claims, De Baets categorically rejected any scrutiny of X1's statements, made connections that did not exist and deliberately pushed every questionable element of X1's testimony into the background. However, De Pauw takes a different tone concerning what could be considered the most spectacular part of the entire X1 episode; X1's identification of the six gendarmes. He cannot explain how X1 came to point out these specific individuals. That De Baets would have 'helped' her, as some later claimed, simply cannot be. De Pauw went to collect the photos, taken from old service cards of gendarmes, from the CBO that day. De Baets had never seen these pictures before, and when X1 went through them, De Pauw was present and could observe her every word and facial

expression. Moreover, the interrogation was recorded on tape. In his note, he writes: 'I do not want to hide the fact that I still believe in it now. In the sense that, in my opinion, they remain items worthy of further exploration, by more thorough interrogation of X1 on this subject.'*6

Patriek De Baets calls the revelation of the names of two colonels 'a turning point' in how his superiors viewed the X1 dossier. 'The Gendarmerie brass initially supported our efforts, eager to roll up a large paedophile, but preferably one without any gendarmes involved', he says. 'And that suddenly became a rather big challenge.'*7

Against the background of the public 'unmasking' of X1 that followed, it sometimes seems that De Baets is obsessed with conspiracies. And yet, the reconstruction of the investigation reveals inexplicable factors. For instance, there was an internal memo one and a half months after X1 identified some high-ranking gendarmerie officers as the perpetrators. It was written by Gendarmerie commander Duterme and addressed to a colleague in Neufchâteau. At that time, there was no discussion about X1's credibility; on the contrary. One week later, the van Hees dossier is officially reopened, and preparations are being made for a series of nationally coordinated meetings for what is called 'the investigation of the century'. Duterme lists seven objections to the X1 dossier. In point 6, he openly questions whether the magistracy will 'take responsibility' and dare to remand the persons cited by X1 in custody until the trial commences. Point 7 then sounds like this: 'Will the hierarchy of the Gendarmerie, within the scenario of a global operation, be able to provide the necessary reinforcement for the tasks arising from the arrests and the frequent telephone taps that go with them?'*8 Those who can read between the lines a little will get the impression that Duterme is announcing here that the Gendarmerie top brass will vigorously boycott the X1 investigation. 'Which is what eventually happened,' adds De Baets. 'In his note, Duterme launches into a lot of foolishness. He presents it as if we did nothing but listen to X1 with astonished gazes and accept everything she said as some judicial gospel. This perspective was later imposed on the media as well.'

His name was Edmond Vissers; hers was Maria-Louiza Vanruyskensvelde. He was born in 1928, she in 1927. He made an occasional living as a photographer. She placed sex worker advertisements in the newspaper and received calls 'at home'. That is to say, in a rickety caravan at the campsite La Hetraie in Sint-Joris-Weert, Oud Heverlee. It was a refuge for people who could not keep up with the rapidly rising rental prices in the capital. The site was scattered with an odd collection of dwellings; it was sometimes difficult to say whether they were caravans, chalets or caravans converted to chalets. It was that kind of place.

On the morning of the 3rd of February, 1985, the corpses of Vissers and Vanruyskensvelde were discovered in their caravan. Vissers was killed with a bullet in his left eye and one behind an ear. Vanruyskensvelde had three shots in her back and one behind an ear. In one hand, Vissers' corpse held an unlit cigarette, in the other a lighter. It appeared as if the victims must have known the perpetrator. The initial enquiry revealed a half-hour window between the murder of Vissers and that of his wife. It seems like she was held at gunpoint during the entire ordeal while the visitor and his later victims held a conversation. At some point, the old prostitute must have attempted a clumsy escape. The police officers from Leuven, who were first to arrive on the scene, deduced this from the bullet that went through the prostitute's back and the traces of blood they found on the caravan door. Her body, they concluded, had been dragged back inside afterwards.*9 The killing was almost an exact copy of how the FN weapons factory executive Juan Mendez was assassinated a year later. With Mendez's name cropping up again, we are back to the Nijvel Gang because, to this day, there are reasons to believe that he supplied weapons to the Gang. In the Practical Shooting clubs, the method of shooting in or behind the ear, preferably with exploding bullets, was taught to some extreme-right fanatics in the early eighties. Ex-BOB officers Amory, Beijer and Bouhouche were also members of those clubs and had these types of weapons and ammunition at their disposal. The Leuven police officer, Robert Bruelmans, noticed other connections. A brief inquiry among the camping residents revealed that until 1983, Vissers was the co-manager of a sex club on the General Jacqueslaan in Etterbeek, near the headquarters of the Gendarmerie. One of his tasks was to take

covert pictures of participants in group sex. Vissers never revealed his motivation for doing so, nor who his clients were. It was equally unclear why he had been banished from the Brussels establishment circles at some point. What was known was that he kept a whole collection of negatives of those photos. When the police searched his caravan after the murder, they found it in total disarray.

There was another oddity about this murder, thought Bruelmans: the demeanour and actions of the other residents. The camping owner, Jean-Marie V, only notified the police at about 10 am the following day, although he would later admit that he had heard what sounded like gunfire 'between two and three o'clock in the morning'. How could he not have heard the gunshots, considering his chalet was right next to those of Vissers and Vanruyskensvelde?

In his chalet, the police found an address card of a small arms company in Ixelles managed by one Robert Darville. In 1985, Darville was little more than a thirteen-in-a-dozen underworld figure. But in August 1989, in the aftermath of the investigation into the kidnapping of former Belgian Prime Minister Paul Vanden Boeynants, the police identified him as the weapons expert of the band of criminals in the gang of top gangsters Patrick Haemers and Philippe Lacroix. A limited number of police officers already knew Darville in 1985 as one of the regular visitors of the club Jonathan, which in turn owed its fame to the 'sex parties in jelly jam'. In addition to the top of the Brussels underworld, the club's clientele also included figures such as Jean Bultot, deputy prison warden of Sint-Gillis, Martial Lekeu, Front de la Jeunesse leader Francis Dossogne and Feddo Godfroid, a Brussels judiciary police officer. For Bultot, Lekeu and Godfroid, the Jonathan was an intermediate step in their metamorphosis into this seedy criminal underworld. Darville was also a very close acquaintance of Juan Mendez. While searching his home, the police found a map showing the route to Mendez's home. Bruelmans did not yet know Darville then, but even without the address card, it was already clear to him that the motive for this murder was likely to be found in the spheres of the Brussels sex orgy underworld. Jean-Marie V, son of a wealthy notary and a failed law student, was a passionate "swinger".

In their glory days, Vissers and Vanruyskensvelde were regular participants at weekend sex parties in various Brussels establishments, mostly around the Bois de la Cambre. They worked mainly for Robert M. Vissers, who was renting apartments on behalf of this individual, where his clients could go about their business undisturbed. Robert M. was from the same generation as the two victims in the caravan. He had already reached the blessed age of 65 in 1985. Shortly after the double murder, the Leuven judiciary police searched R. M.'s house. Their attention was mainly focused on his diary, and browsing it only piqued their interest. The investigators came across the names of all sorts of bigwigs from the banking and financial world, a few leading figures from the Antwerp diamond world, diplomats, officials from the European Community and some well-known names of the Belgian aristocracy. Perhaps, Bruelmans thought, the downtrodden couple had conceived the mad plan to blackmail one of the clients.

In M.'s book of contacts, two telephone numbers listed under "D" are intriguing, although these numbers were not particularly interesting to the police officers at the time. It says: "Dolo Michel 734.43.78, 145 rue des Atrébates and Dolo 649.22.09." The two numbers refer to the aforementioned sex club, probably specifically to its owner, Michel Forgeot. When the antenna Neufchâteau investigators obtain a copy of the file 55/85 in early 1997 from the Leuven-based investigating judge Raymond Decoux, more surprises await them. As one might have guessed, the murder was never cleared up. And judging by what happened to the confiscated evidence, that should come as no surprise. The blood-stained door of the caravan is missing. According to the public prosecutor's office in Leuven, the police did perform a forensic investigation of this gold mine of traces, but to no avail. There is no immediate explanation for the missing door; nevertheless, investigating Judge Decoux does not put much weight on the disappearance of the door. 'If we couldn't find any traces of it back then, then we probably won't be able to find any now.' The Neufchâteau BOB branch was more hopeful in early 1997. In 1985, DNA testing was not yet possible; today, it is.

Another anomaly happened to the register, where the manager recorded the names of all the camping site visitors. At the registry in Leuven, the antenna Neufchâteau found two versions of this register in early 1997: an original and a photocopy. Decour made the copy in the first days after the murder to study the document without worrying about stains. The original document had several names erased with Tipp-Ex and overwritten with different names. No one knows how this could have happened. Presumably, the Gendarmerie returned the register to the manager. After he had made the alterations, the police or the judiciary police re-confiscated it, although this doesn't seem to cause Decour any lack of sleep either. He recalls that the entire affair occurred in an atmosphere of a "police war" among the different police forces in Belgium happening at that time.

This erstwhile nervousness had a cause. One of the suspects is called "MD" and is a gendarme. More specifically, he is a confidant of Colonel Gérard Lhost.

According to some campsite residents, MD must have been the last - or the second to last - to see Maria-Louiza Vanruyskensvelde alive. He entered the campground that evening at 8 pm. Several residents can testify to this. Few, however, saw him leave. When questioned about this, MD says he left at 00.10; one of the campsite witnesses confirms this. What was he doing in the caravan of the 57-year-old prostitute at that late hour? MD claims he responded to an ad in a newspaper but found her 'rather too old'. MD apparently needed more than four hours to make that decision.

One of the names deleted from the register refers to a fellow gendarme and good friend of MD: "MH", a picture of whom was recognised eleven years later by X1. MH's name turns up in this dossier for another reason: he provided MD with an alibi for his use of time on the night of the murder. MH swears that MD arrived at his place around one o'clock in the morning. Therefore, he couldn't have anything to do with the murder committed between two and three am. At that time, the judiciary police officers working on the investigation felt by their little pinky fingers that the two gendarmes had aligned their statements. Their hunch was confirmed when the police

conducted subsequent searches in MD and MH's homes. 'Typically, people react with indignance when you drop in on them and take them away for interrogation,' commented one officer who participated in the search. 'Not so with this duo. It was obvious someone had tipped them off.' A month after the murder, MH retired. He, too, remained in active service in the Group Dyane until his retirement.

In 1989, the police found several pictures of Vissers' photo archive during a house search at Jean-Marie V. It remains unclear what this stack of photo negatives was doing there. From all indications, it is only the remnant of a much more extensive collection. In any case, none of the images shows a minor. The investigation into the brutal double homicide was never officially completed, but Decoux is particularly pessimistic many years later. After the brief excitement about a possible link to the X1 investigation and the elimination of the De Baets team, the entire file goes back into the drawer, and nothing more happens. It really doesn't take much imagination to frame the murder of the old swingers couple in the political twilight zone of sex, blackmail and corruption in Belgium during the early 1980s. The guard at La Hetraie campsite was a former warden at the prison in Saint-Gilles, where Jean Bultot was in charge at the time. One of the chalets was occupied by the brother of Achille Haemers. Haemers senior himself was a regular visitor at the campsite. One of the police officers involved in the investigation was found dead a few years later with three bullets in his head.

The justice department decided it was a suicide. The only person who continued to believe in their involvement after the unsuccessful searches of MH. and MD.'s home was police officer Robert Bruelmans. However, he ran into conflicts with his hierarchy in the following years. He felt systematically thwarted in every initiative he wanted to take to progress this case. Eventually, he was forced to leave the police force on permanent sick leave.

NOTES:

1. 'Bende-advocaten zoeken sleutel extreem-rechts netwerk bij twintig rijkswachters', Het Nieuwsblad 23 November 1996.
2. It was later revealed that in this context, suspicions had arisen within the Gendarmerie against Johan Demol, who at that time was working with the Group Dyane and active in the extreme-right terrorist group Front de la Jeunesse. The current Brussels foreman of the Vlaams Blok will spontaneously play an active role in eliminating adjutant De Baets' investigation in early 1998. Possibly because Belgium is a small country, but another explanation is possible.
3. Analysis text Cl 1, BOB Brussels, the 13th of October 1996, PV 116.391.
4. Interrogation X1, 30 November 1996, PV 150.502. The French version of this interrogation was converted back into Dutch for reproduction, meaning that the pronounced words cannot always be authentic.
5. Although the dispute about whether or not "wanting" to mention the dates of birth was widely reported in the press later and led to various interrogations by examining magistrate Jacques Pignolet, the discussion was devoid of substance. What turns out? The dates of birth are quoted correctly in the first official report drawn up concerning the interrogation in question. BOB Brussels, the 30th of November 1996, PV 116.251.
6. This is a confidential note from Chief Superintendent Danny De Pauw to the commander of the Brussels police force, dated September 15, 1997.
7. Interview with Patriek De Baets, 21 December 1998.
8. Fax from Commander Duterme to Major Guissard (gendarmerie Neufchâteau), 20 January 1997.
9. Summary file 30.67.119/85 of the public prosecutor's office Leuven, BOB Brussels, the 15th of April 1997, PV 150.930.

**4 Winter 1996 -
1997**
Red Herrings

1. 'There is no question of any added political value.'

Investigating Judge Anne Gruwez, November 16th, 1996

'Suspensions were raised against Deputy Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo on the night of November 15th 1996. Di Rupo breathes in the cold winter evening air after a dinner at the Egmont Palace, where he met John Goossens, the CEO of Belgacom; Herman De Croo, the chairman of the VLD; and several other dignitaries of the Flemish and French-speaking society circles. Having listened to a presentation by Jacques Santer (the erstwhile European Commission president) on Europe, which he considers ultraliberal, Di Rupo surrenders to thought. The night will be long, very long, but he does not know that yet. The alarm signal is triggered between midnight and 1 am. Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene has already surprised Minister of State Philippe Busquin by informing him of the revelations that are yet to appear in the Flemish press the next

day. They have agreed to try to contact Elio Di Rupo together, who has been unreachable for hours. First, the prime Minister claims the front page of (centre-right newspaper) De Standaard, under the umbrella of the CVP party. Then Philippe Busquin and Jean-Luc Dehaene meet with Di Rupo. The first court-martial of this eventful period will last most of the night (...). On Saturday, November 16th, a crisis meeting is held in the Deputy Prime Minister's green Saab. The car is on its way to Mons (...). Elio Di Rupo suffers physically and mentally from this brutal intrusion into his private life but is ready to take up the fight.*1 It was November 1996, and the Dutroux case and the White March were still reverberating. A top Belgian minister was suddenly under suspicion of paedophilia. Every story begins in a rather mundane way, as did this one.

Olivier Trusgnach is a young 22-year-old gay man working as a waiter in the prestigious restaurant Scholteshof in Hasselt. In the summer of 1996, he takes advantage of the absence of his boss, Michelin-starred chef Roger Souvereyns to make off with a bunch of securities and silverware and disappear abroad. The Hasselt gendarmerie's investigation fails, which does not please Roger Souvereyns. He decides to file a complaint with one of his many regular patrons, Christian De Vroom, the Commissioner General of the Judicial Police. Between supper and dessert, De Vroom called in the 23rd brigade of the Judicial Police for this case of domestic burglary. This department is usually responsible for combating serious crime, not what appears to be an ordinary burglary case.

Trusgnach was tracked down in Great Britain but was not taken into custody there. He returned to Belgium voluntarily and spontaneously presented himself at the Hasselt Gendarmerie on October 21st, 1996. Contrary to the initial thought of many, this was not the start of the Di Rupo case. According to the report created by the Comité P -the force which polices the police-, we must go back a little further in history: "Early September 1996, Commissioner Georges Marnette of the Brussels Judicial Police received a report from Inspector Antipine which indicated that a certain Olivier Trusgnach could provide information about the influence that certain high-ranking officials exert on the investigation of paedophile networks. This report was based on the statements of an accidental informant. The information is not very

specific, but it is very explosive: several well-known people, including Deputy Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo, are named. It was decided to keep the informant's name secret and to treat him according to the existing instructions.*2

No sooner had Trusgnach been arrested than Commissioner Georges Marnette began to move heaven and earth to meet him. He repeatedly telephoned the Judicial Police in Hasselt, where Commissioner Peelos referred him to the Public Prosecutor's Office. He then explained to substitute Durwael that the Brussels public prosecutor's office was investigating the paedophile practices of certain high-ranking individuals, including (among others) vice-premier Elio Di Rupo. Commissioner Marnette informs him that the statement made by Trusgnach to the gendarmerie may be relevant to this investigation.

In Hasselt, both the investigating judge and the substitute questioned the apparent interest of the Brussels Judicial Police in this affair. As far as they understood, the Trusgnach case was only related to money and some silverware. They asked the local gendarmerie to question Trusgnach, which occurred on October 22nd at 10.50 am. In his first statement, Trusgnach talks about his private life, mundane relations, homosexual preferences, and intimate relations with high-ranking individuals, including Deputy Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo. Nothing he says suggests that he was a victim of anything, let alone that adults abused him sexually before he was eighteen.*3

Two days later, armed with a letter from the Brussels public prosecutor's office, the Brussels Judicial Police interviewed Olivier Trusgnach in the Hasselt prison. He generally repeated what he had already declared to the gendarmerie, but now he claimed that he was only seventeen when he engaged in sex with the aforementioned individuals. According to the law, these are still not objectionable facts since he was sexually not underage at 17 years of age. The following day, Trusgnach became even younger. He reveals to the Hasselt gendarmerie that the Brussels judicial police asked him to "cooperate" with the dossier on paedophilia in exchange for a helpful intervention in his burglary dossier. Trugnach now declares

that at the time of his affair with Elio Di Rupo, he was fifteen years old, in other words, sexually underage.

Commissioner Marnette opened a file with the reference number BR37.11.824/96 on October 22nd 1996. Marnette reported on the statements of an informant, who allegedly said that a certain Laurent V., not identified, owned paedophilia-themed video cassettes and that Olivier Trusgnach, born in 1974, "could provide more information". Oddly: there is no mention of Deputy Prime Minister Di Rupo in the official report of October 22nd.*4

That same day, Marnette contacts substitute Mrs Durwael of the Hasselt Public Prosecutor's Office and declares that his initial official report BR37.11.824/96 implicates Elio Di Rupo. He informs her he has information on some video cassettes regarding Di Rupo that can be unearthed. On October 28th 1996, Marnette and the two inspectors who interrogated Trusgnach, Antipine and Struys drew up their official report on their interrogation of Trusgnach four days earlier. The PV contains not only accusations against ministers Du Rupo and Grafe but also against several other prominent and not-so-prominent Belgians.*5

"This is incendiary," some Flemish journalists whisper to each other when, a few days later, they get their hands on these documents with such astonishing ease that they do not entirely trust the matter. Two others take them to a gendarme, who immediately alerts Major Daniel Decraene of the CBO. After being contacted about this, substitute prosecutor Paule Somers confirms the existence of a file and its great confidentiality. A few hours later, at the beginning of the evening, Somers handed over to the examining magistrate Anne Gruwez the original report of Commissioner Marnette, dated October 22nd 1996, in which - to recall - Elio Di Rupo is not mentioned at all.

Examining magistrate Gruwez called a meeting in his office, attended by various magistrates, investigators and the federal magistrate Andre Vandoren. Given the leak and the fear of losing traces, the decision was made to immediately start searching the homes of two gay men in Sint-Gillis, Laurent V. and Jean V. They were described in Marnette's official report

as possessors of "cassettes" on which high-ranking figures could be seen in compromising positions.

The BOB is tasked with carrying out these searches, as the Brussels Judicial Police handles the file. What happens here is highly unusual, especially concerning such a sensitive investigation. On November 15th at 6 pm, adjutant De Baets and the members of the Brussels BOB working for Neufchateau were summoned again by investigating judge Gruwez. The searches and interrogations of the two witnesses lasted all night. As the report of the Comité-P states, "This operation is shrouded in mystery. The gendarmes, who worked through the night carrying out searches, interrogating the two witnesses and spending a large part of their time looking at the confiscated cassettes, later declared that they did not fully comprehend the game they were playing. 'Both my colleagues and I were astonished that house searches were involved,' says one detective. The original report requesting these searches was dated October 22nd 1996; in the meantime, almost a month had passed. In retrospect, I have doubts about the argument used at the time: it was Friday, and all the Judiciary Police officers had already gone home. Yeah, right...'

Another gendarme, called for backup the following day, reports that his superior De Baets 'telephoned all night to find out more about this dossier since he only had knowledge about a small part of it.' For his part, Judiciary Police inspector Antipine, who provided the information about the two homosexual individuals from Saint-Gilles, declared to the Comité-P that investigating judge Gruwez had contacted him at five o'clock on Saturday morning. She informed him that the cassettes had been checked and that there were no paedophilia cassettes among them. Antipine continues: 'The examining magistrate told me there was no added political value. I think that they deliberately wanted to merge two completely different cases.'

However, that morning, the newspapers of the VUM group's front pages read: 'Last night the Brussels public prosecutor's office was looking for evidence of paedophile acts allegedly committed by several individuals. Among them are a federal vice prime minister and a French-speaking state minister. To this end, the judiciary conducted searches, and judicial circles

confirmed to Het Nieuwsblad/De Standaard. A few weeks ago, suggestions were raised that people had made statements that might incriminate high-ranking politicians. Yesterday, investigators took action on the orders of a Brussels investigating judge. They undertook "police actions" (...) '.*6

The report also appeared in two other newspapers. One of them mentions the name of the socialist vice-premier, Elio Di Rupo. No one makes the distinction; why should one? - between Olivier Trusgnach's statements and the fruitless search for paedophilia cassettes at Laurent V. and Jean V. Judiciary Police inspector Antipine speaks plainly of a "deliberate amalgam." With even more conviction, some BOB officers later say, 'Our friends from the Judicial Police were playing us.' It all happened during the period when the X-files germinated. And coincidentally it is, among others, the De Baets BOB team that is regrettably summoned that Friday night, to be suspected later of having helped to 'orchestrate' the Di Rupo case....

The dossier that the judicial authorities transmitted to the Chamber to ask for the lifting of Minister Di Rupo's parliamentary immunity also included the three official reports in which Olivier Trusgnach first states that he had sexual intercourse with the Minister at 19, then at 17 and finally at 15. This rather striking rejuvenation in the space of a few days immediately aroused the irritation of the chamber members. They also noted that the rest of the dossier was made up of accusations and charges, some of which proved even more incoherent and unreliable than others - mainly second or third-hand gossip.

Even before this affair, Olivier Trusgnach's friends and acquaintances portray him as a mythomaniac and a fantasist who does not hesitate to invent all kinds of titles for himself (prince, count, knight...), all of which are just as pompous as they are grabbed out of thin air. He has even gone so far as to present false birth certificates intended to give him prestigious ancestry, to the vexation of his real family.

The Belgian Parliament never lifted Minister Di Rupo's parliamentary immunity. A few weeks later, he is declared innocent after an investigation by the Court of Cassation.*7

Commissioner Marnette, on the other hand, is accused by investigating judge Laffineur of breaching professional secrecy, an accusation Marnette continues to deny until today. Laffineur is in charge of investigating the origin of the leaks in this case, which shook the Belgian government for several weeks.

On August 14th, 1999, one day short of three years after the Dutroux case erupted, Inspector Grégory Antipine hung himself at his home in Waremmé. Rumour had it that he was experiencing personal problems. According to his former boss Georges Marnette, 'he was never the same after the Di Rupo case'. When RTBF journalist Alain Gerlache interviews Minister Di Rupo during the political quarter-hour of "A bout portant" a few weeks after his troubles subsided, he tries to find an answer to the only question that remains: why? 'I think what happened to me may have served to hide much worse things happening in this country.'

NOTES:

1. From Elio Di Rupo, from caterpillar to butterfly, Chantal Samson and Livio Serafini, ed. Luc Pire, 1997.
2. Report of the Standing Monitoring Committee for the Police Services, Examination of how the police acted concerning the preparation of a dossier that gave rise to the procedure under Article 103 of the Constitution about Deputy Prime Minister Di Rupo.
3. Interrogation of Olivier Trusgnach, gendarmerie Hasselt, 22 October 1996. The interrogation is within the framework of a newly opened file HA.90.42.103825196.
4. Brussels Judiciary Police, October 22nd 1996, PV 824.
5. Interrogation of Olivier Trusgnach, Brussels Judiciary Police, October 28th 1996, PV 39.686.
6. 'Court seeks evidence against ministers on paedophilia', De Standaard/Het Nieuwsblad 16 November 1996.
7. French Community Minister Jean-Pierre Grafé resigned on December 9th 1996. The investigation, which revolved around the statements made by Trusgnach and by a minor about paedophile practices in the Minister's apartment in Liège, was entrusted to the Liège court. The

public prosecutor's office dismissed Grafé from prosecution in September 1998.

2. 'No problem, you're not bothering us.'

Police officers were very accommodating to journalists during the house search at Abrasax on 21 December 1996.

December 21st, 1996. A little before eight in the evening. More than a hundred detectives, gendarmes, Judiciary Police officers and municipal agents are on the warpath in the Charleroi region. Neufchâteau is taking its first step in an investigation against Satanists - to prevent them from sacrificing a child. Everything has been prepared in utmost secrecy.

It is said that this is the most delicate and dangerous operation of Neufchâteau since the arrest of Marc Dutroux. The media was asked to observe radio silence, and some journalists in the know were asked to keep quiet. However, while working at the French-Belgian television station RTBf Charleroi, one was on guard for two days in the van that was customarily used for their hidden camera comedy program. He gets a tad nervous when two men from the observation team notice him. They quickly reassure him: 'No problem, you are not bothering us.'

Once the go-ahead was given, the Emile Vanderveldestraat in Forchiesla-Marche was closed in both directions. Gendarmerie vans with flashing lights block the street and divert the traffic. No one can get through anymore. The show of force is so great that it soon becomes clear that it is not 'coincidentally' waiting for the potential 'guests' of a Satanic sacrificial feast. The only people present are Dominique Kindermans and her partner, Francis Desmet, watching television when the doorbell rings at

number 223 in the Vanderveldestraat. A white facade of the first townhouse on this street, with a copper sign next to the front door: 'Institute Abrasax, non-profit organisation - Psychotherapy - Magic.' Francis Desmet had barely opened the door when body armour-clad police stormed in. Dominique Kindermans clings to her chair: 'Is this a robbery?' she asks. 'No madam, this is the gendarmerie!'

The house search lasted all night. The RTBf cameraman, who has left his hiding place, films the comings and goings of the investigators who carry away boxes and equipment until the early morning. They even take a small freezer and contents. The judicial police, she later explained, did not have a refrigerator of their own to preserve the seized vials of blood. The gendarmerie questioned Francis Desmet and Dominique Kindermans throughout the night. They have nothing to hide, they say. The best evidence is that a few years earlier, they had collaborated on Françoise Van de Moortele's broadcast "*L'écran Témoin*" on RTBf, an episode on witchcraft. At the time, they also allowed the filming of a black mass at their home. Dressed in his uniform of 'grand master', Francis Desmet can be seen standing in front of an altar on which lies a naked and masked woman. Desmet and Kindermans attest in this episode that Abrasax is a non-profit organisation, not a cult. Abrasax, founded in Sauvenière in 1990, underwent a financial probe when it planned to establish itself in the Charleroi region in 1991. The Judicial Police of Charleroi and substitute Lambert verified their legal statutes and books and concluded everything was in order. 'There is no child here, just as no human or animal sacrifice can be found. 'Sometimes we use blood for certain rituals, but that is from the heart of an animal, bought from the butcher. And no, we do not know Marc Dutroux nor Bernard Weinstein.'*1

However, Dutroux is the main topic of the investigators' questions. At the beginning of the Dutroux investigation, the Charleroi gendarmerie conducted a house search in Bernard Weinstein's abandoned chalet in Jumet. Among loads of garbage collected at the site, the gendarmes discovered a piece of paper, folded in four with a few typed phrases: 'Bernard, don't forget that the party is happening soon and that the high priestess is expecting her present. Anubis.' In the official report of the search, there is no trace of this somewhat

suspect message.*2 It is clear that the investigators only made their "discovery" a few days or weeks later.

Anubis is also the avatar of 'major' Francis Desmet. That name is anything but secret: Anubis and Nahema-Nephthys, alias Dominique Kindermans, published a book a few years earlier: "The Prince of this World", a 'manual of Western demonology and dictionary of demons'*3 They signed this book with their ritual names, photos and biographies. To the investigators, the high priestess from the message to Weinstein can be none other than Anubis' partner, Dominique Kindermans. And what could the gift she expects to be anything else but a child - a child to sacrifice?

The detectives leave the Abrasax building in the early morning without bothering Desmet and Kindermans anymore. They found nothing. There was nothing to find either. The detectives organised a follow-up interview with the couple a few months later. They say they still have no explanation for this wrong track. 'We insisted on getting more details about that infamous Weinstein paper,' explains Dominique Kindermans: The investigators made it clear to us for more than a half-hour that they strongly suspected I had written this note. According to the investigation by the judicial police of Charleroi, the note was printed on an inkjet printer. However, they told us that the various documents found in Weinstein's chalet were so wet that they had to dry out in the gendarmerie building in Jumet before they could be scrutinised. The other documents found along with the note to Weinstein were also water-damaged. I then pointed out that the dampness should have affected a text printed with an inkjet printer. The text would start to leak. They told me that it was surely a photocopy.*4

Where did this message come from? Who wrote it? Why was it found at Weinstein's place? To this day, no questions have been answered conclusively. Some witnesses have spoken of another Anubis, a former member of Abrasax, who is now working in Brussels. But an investigation into this person has yielded nothing. Dominique Kindermans has her own hypothesis. She is convinced that the note is a forgery and was planted in Weinstein's chalet in Jumet or among the things lying around to dry. 'So, it assisted in raising suspicion towards Abrasax, perhaps to destabilise our organisation,

perhaps even to steer the whole investigation towards satanism. But of course, we don't know who might have done that.'

Despite the Abrasax house search flop in Forchies-la-Marche, the press exposed the case. The press initially respected the 48-hour article release embargo declared by prosecutor Bourlet but then let rip. Several newspapers and channels reported on the horror for days. It is December 23rd, two days before Christmas. Belgians are bombarded with information about satanism, sacrifices, and blood. The press mentions the sinister 'order note' in the case and elaborates that some rituals, on certain days, require victims of a certain age, especially very young victims. Some newspapers report on rituals where 'limbs are cut off from the victim'.

It is hard to believe that one crumpled piece of paper was the only reason for the show of force in Forchies-la-Marche. 'Various elements of this dossier all point in the direction of Abrasax', states the title of the official report that initiated the spectacular raid in Forchies-la-Marche two days earlier. A careful reading of those elements involved uncovers five of them and then realises that there are only two hypotheses: that of a deliberately created false trail or that of some policemen who have entirely lost the plot. The official report states in all seriousness, "An investigation carried out in 1993 into the non-profit organisation Abrasax revealed that 150,000 (Belgian) francs had been paid in repayment of a loan. One hundred fifty thousand francs is also the price Marc Dutroux said he could fetch to deliver a girl.' If that line of reasoning had been extended logically to all Belgians who paid or received 150,000 francs, then investigating judge Langlois - under whose leadership all this happened- would have been allowed to deliver many thousands of search warrants. As a second 'indicator', the report mentions an incident that drew the attention of the Rebecq gendarmerie on April 9th 1994. A lady dressed in black was urinating in the street. The police took her to the police station for questioning, which took a bizarre turn. In the interrogation room, she began to undress and masturbate in front of the gendarmes. She shouted things like "Take me, Anubis!" and "I am carrying the child of Satan!

Furthermore, the police file quotes liberally from "Le Prince de ce Monde", specifically the part where Desmet and Kindermans explain on page 62: 'Sacrifices with blood are carried out the same way as the Three Ceremonies. One cuts the child's or the animals' throat above the altar...'. Gendarme Poncelet, author of the official report, does not say that this is all meant symbolically, and a few pages later, the authors indicate that they have serious doubts about the periodic stories about actual human sacrifices. The fifth element is by far the most exciting: "An informant from the Brussels BOB informs us that a woman was forced to give up a child for sacrifice according to the satanic calendar and that the non-profit association Abrasax must be taken seriously. Also, it reported that the winter solstice was coming up in two days, on December 21st. This is an important date for Satanism and Luciferianism.*5

Even after the flop of December 21st, 1996, some investigators will continue to diligently search in the milieu of cults and other occult figures or organisations. Strangely enough, this was done by detectives from the Arlon Judicial Police, the Charleroi gendarmerie, the Brussels Judicial Police... All of them police officers who, a few months later, are front and centre to denounce the statements of the X-witnesses. 'Satanism in the investigation at Neufchâteau', they would say, 'but don't you remember what happened at Abrasax?' Witnesses X1, X2 and X3 have described horrific things, but the word 'satanism' has not passed their lips - except to mock it.

NOTES:

1. Interview with Dominique Kindermans and Francis Desmet, December 23, 1996.
2. Search of the home of Bernard Weinstein, Daubressestraat 63 in Jumet, Charleroi gendarmerie, August 19, 1996, PV 102.434.
3. Le Prince de ce Monde, published by Savoir pour Etre, 1993.
4. Interview with Dominique Kindermans, January 1997.

5. Information on Abrasax, Charleroi gendarmerie,
December 19, 1996, PV 100.532

***3 Today, again, nothing was found in
Jumet.'***

The Press, December 13th, 1996 - 27 May 1997.

- They'll be back, I'm sure of it. They'll be back today or tomorrow.
- Well, Jacky, when will you shut up about this? They won't find anything in Jumet. Not a dead chicken, not a bone, nothing.
- Well, I can't imagine they'd come here and cut down trees for no reason. And Dutroux knew the area... Eugène!
- Huh?
- You were in the same school as him as a kid, weren't you?
- With whom?
- Dutroux, here, at the municipal school in Roux.

- Pff... Yes. The kid from the back bench.
- Jacky, if you ask me, they won't start digging with the holidays just around the corner.
- They just might.

It is Friday, December 13, 1996. At the Etangs Caluwaert café, at the foot of the old mine spoil heap in the hamlet of Roux, the manager, Jacky Courard, was entertaining the last of his customers with a few facts about the business that were stirring everyone's interest. Something is about to happen, as he heard from a journalist who left his business card here two months ago.*1 Jacky had begun to think back nostalgically to October. The media circus that descended on the place was content with soggy French fries, soup and sandwiches. The media generously covered the financial losses caused by the absence of fishermen requiring peace and quiet.

It all started with that odd group of walkers on the evening of Friday 4th October. Jacky had been the first to recognise Marc Dutroux, dressed in a bulletproof vest and surrounded by gendarmes. The group walked into the meadow and explored the entrance to the old Bordia tunnel at the foot of the mine ridge. Dutroux pointed left and right as if saying: 'Here might be something interesting to find.' The gendarmes have also brought Michèle Martin to the scene. She had made some helpless gestures, indicating that she only had information based on second-hand accounts. Jacky read it in the newspaper a few days later. Neufchâteau was on the trail of new child corpses. Right on his doorstep, no less.

As it turned out, the investigators did not know precisely what they were looking for when they first started digging there. After Dutroux's erstwhile companion Michel Lelièvre had told a bizarre story to the police shortly after his arrest about Dutroux's obsession for coalmines, Michele Martin had vaguely referred to an old mining site in Jumet.*2 The Neufchâteau investigators only started realising the potential significance of the location when they started receiving witness statements from Roux villagers. Residents reported that Marc Dutroux spent part of his childhood here. The gendarmerie's identification team (SRI) and the civil defence team plodded through the mud for two weeks. The

investigators descended into the tunnel with flashlights and brought up buckets of dirt and coal dust. After a while, there was a threat of subsidence, which presented them with a dilemma. Perhaps Dutroux had hidden the bodies first and then caused the whole thing to collapse. Some argued that the more difficult it became, the more likely they were right. The media reported daily on the searches. In the end, they found nothing of interest. The digging efforts came to a halt, and the Bordia Tunnel seemed forgotten.*3

Now, in mid-December 1996, a tense calm prevails in the village. Neighbours have again seen men in yellow overalls and carrying oxygen bottles on their backs walking around. They cordoned off parts of the forest with red and white ribbons. Jacky has already gone to take a look and is sure of it. Today or tomorrow, his café will again be the centre of global news. He'd better replenish the shelves.

While the café manager is cracking jokes with his customers that night, the phone rings at 1h30 am at the home of Tiny Mast, the mother of Kim and Ken Heyrman. The two children, aged eleven and eight, disappeared on the evening of the 4th of January 1994 on the Noorderlaan in Antwerp. The mutilated body of Kim was fished up from the Asia dock a month later with traces of rape. Ken is still missing. On the phone, an inspector from the Antwerp judiciary police asks Tiny Mast if she can 'drop by at the police station.' The relationship between the mother and the detectives displays a shocking example of a lack of police tact. After the discovery of Kim's corpse, a judiciary police officer spoke publicly of a prostitute in a coffin'. On another occasion exhibiting lousy police decorum, Tiny Mast was shoved out of an interrogation room while being called hysterical. At the police station, they make her wait for a good while on a bench in the corridor.

- Mrs Mast, I have been asked to inform you that the excavations in Jumet will resume in a few hours. There is new information.
- What are they looking for?
- They're looking for children's bodies.
- Do you think Ken is there?
- I'm told there's an eighty per cent chance.*4

With that, they send Tiny Mast back home. She is not the only one who will try to dispel the haunted thoughts in her mind during the ensuing hours. Marie-Noëlle Bouzet, Elizabeth Brichet's mother, is also briefed of a 'significant chance' that her child's body will be found. Several other parents of missing children were notified by telephone.

The village centre of Roux, a hamlet of Jumet, has no more than a few streets with a handful of ashen-tinted houses. At the back of the hamlet rises, amidst swampy fields and forests, the massive coal mountain of the Saint-Louis mine that closed in 1965. Since then, this suburb of Charleroi has climbed to the top of the unemployment statistics. The mine tower has been demolished for years, and the old miners' houses were colonised by people living off social benefits and scrap dealers. Only the coal waste remains, resting on an artificially created hill abandoned over thirty years ago. Some mine shafts are quite close to the surface, grandparents tell their grandchildren. There was a time in Roux when one could hear the voices of miners in the living room. Many residents have forgotten the existence of this underground corridor system. After the mine closed, dozens of pits and shaft pipes were filled with waste from the Cockerill Sambre steel plant. Others collapsed or became overgrown with brambles. Occasionally, children playing in the woods at Heignes discovered a dark hole, an old air pipe inhabited by rabbits.

On the morning of December 14, Roux looks like a fortified town preparing for a siege. All roads are hermetically sealed. Except for the residents themselves, no one can get in. The woods are swarming with police while also conducting house searches in the village. They spread out over the fields and comb the gardens of the miners' houses. Journalists try to penetrate the area. Photographers and camera crew are plucked from the bushes and escorted back to police vans parked at the edge of the roadblocks. The assembled journalists suspect "something big and spectacular is coming our way." There is no longer talk of one or two victims but of a mass grave.

In the Namur prison that evening, the three inmates in cell 66 listened to the news reports on radio RTL. While the newsreader talks about the police invasion in the small village of Roux, Jean-Paul Raemaekers does not lose sight of his

cellmate, Guy Focant, for a second. A day later, on Sunday morning, December 15, 1996, Raemaekers reports to the Brussels BOB:

- I tell you; he turned white as a sheet.
- Because of the radio report?
- I saw him paying close attention to the news. Ten minutes later, he crept into bed. He said he had a backache, but it looked like he almost had a heart attack. That news gave him a shock, for sure. He didn't say another word until the following morning.*5

Raemaekers, at the end of September 1996, became what he had always wanted to be: intriguing. With his statements on sex parties attended by magistrates, politicians, businessmen and diplomats, he has acquired a place in the gallery of crown witnesses of the Neufchâteau investigation. Almost all the other statements come from victims. He is the only perpetrator who talks. 'I'm doing it for the cause,' he sounds. 'I am a repentant paedophile. Once a week, I receive care from a psychiatrist and a psychologist. Every day, I think of my victims and repent with all my heart. I want to earn myself back by telling the full truth.'*6 There are reasons to believe that there are ulterior motives behind Raemaekers' eagerness to talk. Still, at the end of 1996, the investigators were not inclined to consider this.

After a series of new arrests were made following the investigation into the murder of Walloon Socialist Party leader Cools, there was much discussion in September 1996 about the status of informants in prison. Minister of Justice De Clerck made it known that in Belgium, following the example of Italian justice, there should be an arrangement whereby criminals who help the Justice Department fight against organised crime could claim a reduction in their sentences. In theory, Raemaekers knows, as a convict serving a life sentence, he will have to wait until 2003 or 2005 to enjoy penitentiary leave for the first time—the numbers quickly dawn on him.

The side dossier 96/111, born from Raemaekers' statements, initially focuses on lawyer W, of whom it looks certain that

Raemaekers must have known him very well. For years, there have been rumours going around the capital about this lawyer's paedophile obsessions, sex parties and blackmail practices, which he exploited to build a powerful network of relationships.

The Brussels BOB officers assigned to Raemaekers have a good read on him. They have never known him to be so pleasant and accommodating. Everything went well for a month until a phone call came in on Wednesday, October 9th 1996, at 12:50 p.m. The detective who answers the call is First Sergeant Dany Lesciauskas, one of the regular interrogators. Raemaekers: 'I have received death threats. Help!' Lesciauskas can tell from his witness's panicked voice that his attendance is urgently requested. The threat, he understands, was uttered verbatim by one of Lawyer W's close associates, who had come to pay him a visit in prison.

However, by the time Lesciauskas visits Raemaekers in prison that afternoon, along with Sergeant Serge Winkel, Raemaekers appears to have forgotten all about the threat. The BOB officers now listen to a confusing story about a man who has been his cellmate for five days. It is about 62-year-old Guy Focant, at first impression, a 'small fish' paedophile who was transferred from the prison of Saint-Hubert.

- Before I speak, I want a few assurances.
- State them.
- It must remain a secret. My cellmate must not find out that I talked to you about this.
- Don't worry, just tell me.
- I also want him to be transferred immediately to another prison if he should somehow find out. Do you understand? Otherwise, he will kill me.
- I'm sure that can be arranged.
- Well then. You'll never guess. Since recently, I've been in the cell with that man. Do you know Neufchâteau questioned him about Nihoul?
- Well... Yes, of course.
- He, of course, denied having had any contact with Nihoul to the investigators. But he confided in me that he had known Michel Nihoul for years. He was a client of a paedophilia

network in which he participated for ten years. He explained the entire system to me from A to Z.*7

The essence of Raemaekers' account is summarised that same day by the BOB officers in a fax headed 'confidential' for examining Judge Connerotte. It goes as follows: 'The person concerned is incarcerated within the framework of a paedophilia case and, knowing that Raemaekers is also a paedophile, he would confide in him about certain matters. It is about Guy Focant (...). Raemaekers explains that this man is involved in child kidnapping, but if questioned, he would formally deny everything. Indeed, being 62 years old, if convicted for such an offence, would carry a life sentence, and he would never leave prison alive. He explained to Raemaekers that for ten years, he had been abducting boys and girls from a very young age. They are destined for delivery to (Michel) Nihoul.'*8

In their fax, the BOB officers mentioned the name of a top magistrate from Liège, who according to Raemaekers, is 'an important client of the network.' They also present the result of the checks they carried out on this Focant character. Those look more impressive than they are. Raemaekers said that Focant told him he had been married for 42 years. That is accurate, the investigators admit.

On Monday, October 14th 1996, five days after Raemaekers appears to have triggered the unmasking of the extensive network, Jean-Marc Connerotte is relieved of the Dutroux case by the Court of Cassation. However, initial contact with the new lead investigating judge, Jacques Langlois, allows the investigators to conclude that he is interested in this trail. On Saturday, 19th October, Raemaekers was escorted out of his cell and taken to the Brussels BOB station. At first eye contact with Raemaekers, the investigators immediately notice that he looks ready to talk about something. I want to inform you of an important detail,' says Raemaekers. 'We were discussing the places in Belgium where Focant found his kidnap victims, and I started talking about little Elizabeth Brichet. I told him I thought it bizarre that she had never been found. He completely froze and didn't say another word. That reaction struck me.'*9

62-year-old Guy Focant, claimed by Raemaekers to be the key to the Nihoul network, has only been in Namur prison for a few days, but his reputation as an old nag is already known throughout the wing. The man constantly complains of heart and back issues and spends most of the day in bed. There is only one topic of conversation to rouse the old man from his lethargy: Spain. He wants to emigrate. His small house in Comblain-au-Pont is for sale. 'It's a backward village,' shrugs Focant. 'I'm never going back there.'

This statement would have sounded like music to the ears of the inhabitants of Comblain-au-Pont in those days. The little Ardennes village in the Ourthe Valley, barely thirty kilometres from Liège, is the kind of place landscape painters sometimes spend days looking for. The forests and neatly maintained streets exude a Twin Peaks-like atmosphere everywhere. When Guy Focant settled here at the beginning of the 1980s, he was met with suspicion. He came from Seraing, where he worked as a transport clerk at Cockerill Sambre. After a heart attack, he was declared unfit for work. At this point, he became a hyper-active senior with more hobbies than free time: tenor in a male choir, collector of antiques, wood engraver, and director in amateur theatre. He also had a dark side, which the residents of Comblain-au-Pont noticed. No sooner had he been installed in his new home than the comings and goings of eccentric guests began. They arrived around nine o'clock in the evening and left with a lot of noise when the whole village was already asleep. Once, a neighbour mustered the courage to ask what all the racket was about. 'We swap partners,' Focant answered cheerfully. The story became even more embarrassing when this Walloon version of Sjef Van Oekel (a Flemish TV comedy character) rang his neighbour's doorbell one late evening, stating he had exhausted his collection of porn videos and asked him if he didn't have anything nice and disgusting lying around: 'I urgently need to masturbate'. In June 1995, the neighbourhood police officer living down the road registered the first complaint. A butcher's assistant recounted that when he was thirteen, Focant took him home, where he witnessed sex parties. Focant had promised his parents that he would teach their son wood engraving. The boy later told us that Focant took him to a theatre performance in Grâce-Hollogne. During the intermission, he had to satisfy some men sexually. Focant also took him to a parking lot in the

woods of Sart-Tilman, where he sent the boy to meet some men who waited in the bushes for the headlight signal. Focant occasionally rewarded the butcher's servant. A pair of wooden clogs carved from wood, or an engraving with his motto: 'On ne désire pas ce qu'on ne connaît pas.' (one should not desire what one doesn't know).

A board with the same text adorns the walls of some other established families in Comblain-au-Pont. The butcher's boy was not the only victim. After the butcher's boy, two other boys and a woman reported incidents to the police. The sex games had been going on since 1983, revealed an investigation by the court in Huy. We looked for traces of a network around Focant but never found them,' said prosecutor Franskin of Huy later. 'The man was a sex addict, that's for sure; a veritable pervert. He corresponded with like-minded sexual deviants from all over the world via mailbox. He carefully kept track of the size of all these individuals' genitals, that sort of thing. His so-called network consisted of a trio of pensioners. One of them was a sad character who lived in a caravan and was not even interested in young boys. He participated out of loneliness.'*10

The investigators strongly suspected that there were more perpetrators, although they never were identified, prosecutor Franskin admits. 'But our legal basis for a further investigation was not particularly solid either. Most of the victims were mentally handicapped, which impacted the credibility of their testimony.' Focant received five years in prison in early 1996, two of which were suspended.*11

The BOB officers note that Raemaekers did not lie about one matter. Guy Focant was indeed questioned about Michel Nihoul a few weeks ago. This happened after the butcher's assistant had knocked on the door of the Liège police. He had recognised one of the customers, that overweight guy who loved to sprinkle his victim with water using a watering can before committing the act. That was Nihoul, says the butcher's clerk now: 'Nihoul came twice.' When the police in Liege show the boy a photograph of Nihoul, he recoils. It is that person, I am sure of it, he whispers.*12 During his interrogation two days later, Focant formally denied having ever met any of the suspects in the Dutroux case in person.*13 The butcher's

assistant, it later emerged, was no model of mental stability. A few weeks after his testimony, he joined a monastery as a novice.

The harvest of Raemaekers' detective work sometimes seems spectacular, sometimes not. The BOB officers learn that Focant is active with the theatre group Les Hollognoises from Grâce-Hollogne, that he has a gay boyfriend, and while in prison, is bragging about his good contacts with former Partie Socialiste minister Alain Van der Biest, the former mayor of Grâce-Hollogne. 'One of the PS Aldermen there is also a paedophile, by the way,' says Raemaekers. 'I also learned that Focant and Nihoul prostituted underage boys, but he offered no further details. I have since learned that they prostituted four of them and that one of the four boys disclosed the facts. As for the kidnappings, Focant told me that he abducted underage boys and girls and received payment for these from Nihoul (...). Thus, I learned that he had kidnapped twenty to twenty-five boys and some girls. His victims were between thirteen and fifteen years old. He said he worked mostly with Germans. As for the fees, he told me that he had earned 500,000 Belgian francs at some point.'*14

In one fell swoop, Raemaekers talks about politicians whom Focant claimed were protecting him. These are Elio Di Rupo and Jean- Pierre Grafé. He made this claim on October 19th 1996, a month before Georges Marnette's bogus investigation made the country's front pages. Does Raemaekers have the gift of foresight, or is he one of the puppets in the closet of those who fabricated the Di Rupo case?

Anyone who would have seen the two BOB officers and Raemaekers enter the BOB headquarters in mid-October at the avenue of the Iron Cross in Brussels would never suspect that the latter is serving a sentence of life imprisonment. Raemaekers casually trails the officers, sometimes even with several meters of space between them. The BOBs take him to restaurants, don't bother to escort him during restroom visits and make small talk with him. They even make a detour to pick up a computer somewhere. Raemaekers lends a hand and is left standing on the street with a computer monitor in his arms at some point.

Raemaekers gets along well with BOB officer Dany Lesciauskas. The latter seems to be an unconditional believer in everything Raemaekers says. On October 29th, his witness was in a talkative mood. Kidnap victim Elizabeth Brichet is once again the main subject. "That is a case you have to see with Michel Nihoul," Raemaekers repeats the words Guy Focant said to have whispered to him.

Raemaekers flavours his presentation with new names of politicians and mentions a hotel in Spa where they allegedly had sex with the children supplied by Focant. He attempted to add more gravitas to his claims, so he permitted the investigators to copy his pocket diary. In it, he recorded Focant's statements between October 21st and 27th.*15

The Namur public prosecutor's office set up a "Brichet cell" shortly after the Dutroux case. It began to reinvestigate several old leads. This new investigation also initiated a new search in the Canary Islands, where Belgian vacationers had spotted the twelve-year-old girl in the months following her disappearance. When Bel RTL reported this on November 6th, something strange happened in cell 66. Raemaekers describes: 'Focant immediately told me that it was a false lead because she was dead and (the events happened) in Belgium. He mentioned the name of Jean-Michel Nihoul as the perpetrator of this abduction and added something about how it happened. It is Nihoul who allegedly killed Elizabeth. I have not been able to obtain more details, but it is clear that this is a subject he is hesitant to talk about.'*16

Meanwhile, in cell 66, there is a coming and going of prisoners charged with sex offences. For the investigators of dossier 111/96, this has the advantage that another prisoner can eavesdrop on what Focant and Raemaekers are telling each other. But this fly on the wall will only add to the mystery. Starting October 14th, that fly is Claude Jasselette, 36. He is a voracious paedophile who owes his latest legal problems to his involvement in the network of the Hasselt-based gendarme Hedwig Huybrechts. This individual turned his Mercedes into a mobile escort agency and drove around the country with children abducted from former Yugoslavia. The rumour goes that Jasselette must have known Marc Dutroux well.

He was the godfather of the daughter of Bruno Tagliaferro, the scrap metal dealer from Keumiée with whom Dutroux sometimes did business.

Jasselette keeps a low profile in cell 66. He doesn't like his cellmates at all. He can just about tolerate Raemaekers' intrusive chatter, but Focant's complaining drives him insane. After six days, Jasselette claims religious motives to request a transfer to another cell. His place is immediately taken by a certain Joël Glaude, who remains in cell 66 for only two days. From October 22nd, the third bunk bed is occupied by a character even more colourful than his predecessors: Francis Debuissou, a 41-year-old railroad worker who retired early due to a work accident. The newcomer is a tearful type. Focant and Raemaekers watch with amazement as the man transforms the foot of his bed into a small altar and pleads to the Virgin Mary. The public prosecutor of Namur is accusing Debuissou of having prostituted his two eldest sons for money to a certain René Potemberg, just like Focant, a retired woodworker with a lot of spare time and paedophile tendencies. 'But how could I have known that!' laments Debuissou. 'René Potemberg was a childhood friend. He lived in our street and came by every week. He was fond of the children. We were poor. Potemberg was rich and could give the children gifts we couldn't afford. One time, he suggested that we take them on vacation. Why not, my wife and I thought. Now, we are accused of having loaned out our children. That is completely untrue. I'd rather starve to death!'

Raemaekers studies the photos of Emmanuel and Laurent Debuissou, ages seven and nine, with interest. Debuissou brought a small plastic picture album in which he hopes to find solace. It includes a picture of his house in Meux, a village in the countryside near Namur. 'That's where it all started,' Debuissou sighs. 'It was raining inside. My wife and I had no money to repair the roof. Then René Potemberg offered to lend us the necessary 105,000 francs. He said we did not have to pay the money back immediately. When the police found the promissory note we had signed, they considered it proof that we had rented out our children.' Raemaekers looks upon this heap of human misery and says: 'What you need is a good lawyer.'¹⁷ A few days later, the Brussels attorney JeanMarie Flagothier can also add Francis Debuissou to his clientele.

Looking back at the Jumet episode, the noticeably muted critique of the media is remarkable. At the end of October 1997, a few months after the end of the excavations at Dutroux place in Jumet, the well-informed weekly magazine *Le Soir Illustré* wrote: 'We know, or we should know, that an investigation is not a linear process. Certain working hypotheses have to be abandoned because they didn't pass scrutiny. So it is, for example, with the excavations in Jumet. These had to be undertaken but yielded nothing.'¹⁸ The situation illustrates a narrative that spread like wildfire through the media a few months later. The journalists who dumped on the X-witnesses presented the dig in Jumet as a somewhat more serious undertaking. Considering the testimonies from the inmates from cell 66, they say investigative magistrate Langlois had no choice but to turn the entire mine upside down. Halfway through 1998, the Flemish weekly *Knack* also talks about 'unavoidable' excavations in the spirit of that time.' Unfortunately, one can draw only one conclusion from a reconstruction of the events. If there was one legal initiative in the field which was perfectly predictable to be completely useless, it was Operation Jumet.

On the 1st of November 1996, Raemaekers was again a guest of the BOB in Brussels. For a change, he talks about lawyer W. More specifically, he mentions the addresses where he and W collected children in the early 1990s to deliver them to sex parties. 'In May 1992, I went with the person in question (W) to a village in the region of Namur whose name began with the letter M, followed by a vowel. Early in the afternoon, he went there to pick up two little boys who I believe were about five, six or seven years old. The older of the two responded to the name Emmanuel and the other Laurent. I seem to remember that Emmanuel wore glasses. A name comes to mind, namely Debuissou or Dubuissou. Now that you have interjected me, this name was on the mailbox. We went to pick up the children from a single-family home. A kind of social home, where works were in progress.'¹⁹

Raemaekers then perfectly describes the cottage and tells how he and W picked up the kids and took the highway to Brussels via the Belgrade exit. 'I remember W telling me that he rarely

went to this address. I think W kept the children with him for one night in a hotel.'

The BOB officers Lesciauskas and Winkel are beside themselves with excitement when they enter this data into the computer. The cover page of their official report 115.444, under the heading 'research/verification', states in almost euphoric terms: 'We establish that the information provided by Raemaekers Jean-Paul and the abovementioned administrative data correspond in all respects. It is, therefore, likely that we have the identities of two potential victims of W.'²⁰ The investigators do not, however, verify in which prison cell in Namur Debuissou resides. If they had done so, they would have immediately understood where Raemaekers obtains his information. The investigators did not even notice that Raemaekers wrongly calculated the ages of the two little Debuissous. Emmanuel and Laurent could not have been older than three and five in 1992.

When Raemaekers returns to his cell on the evening of Friday November 1st, he tells his cellmates that he is being questioned in connection with the company PEFI - he gives Debuissou a friendly slap on the shoulder. 'I have made very positive statements about you today. You'll see, now everything will be all right.'

A week later, Raemaekers turned things up a notch. Possibly he realised that one look at Namur prison's records could be enough to unmask him. Hence, he brings everything and everyone together in one large, interlinked network. He now says that the same Debuissou who lent his children to lawyer W was also a close acquaintance of Guy Focant. Raemaekers promptly adds a few more names: René Potemberg and Claude Jasselette. These three individuals are familiars in paedophilia circles.'²¹ It is not surprising that this, too, turns out to be correct upon scrutiny. Debuissou himself told Raemaekers that his children were talking about a certain 'Claudy', better known as Claude Jasselette.²² The investigators swallow it all. All this happens before the start of the Jumet excavations, not afterwards.

On November 15th, it's that time again: Raemaekers had "explosive news". It will be the prelude to the biggest house

search in Belgian criminal history. The action will last eight months and cost tens of millions of Belgian francs. Here comes the big news, told by Raemaekers himself. 'Last week Wednesday, when Focant, Debuissou and I were in the cell, we listened to the news reports on Bel RTL at six or seven in the evening. (...) There was talk of the ending of excavations in the Charleroi mine shaft and the area outside the mine that was still supposed to be searched. At that time, Guy Focant said word for word: "Quelle bande de cons, ils n'ont pas été assez loin."*23 "(what a bunch of idiots, they didn't search deep enough)."

The attentive reader must have noticed that barely two weeks have passed since Raemaekers told his story about 'the village of M.' Now he makes no secret of the fact that Debuissou is one of his cellmates. Strangely, none of the interrogators dwell on this.

Francis Debuissou does only three things in the cell: eat, complain and sleep. This last activity, says Raemaekers, makes him fail to hear Focant's historic words. But, he continues, when Debuissou had briefly left the cell the next day, he got Focant to speak about Elizabeth Brichet again. 'I learned then that she was dead but that her death resulted from a case that had ended badly. Her body is in Belgium, more precisely, in a mine tunnel. Given the fact that the previous day, the RTL (news channel) stated that excavations happened in a mine shaft and are now halted, I concluded that it must be exactly that shaft where she was buried, but that the investigators had not dug far enough.'

Raemaekers goes even further during the same interrogation. During the conversation, I remarked that it was odd that little Ken had never been found while his sister was found drowned. He answered me immediately: 'Oui, il est enterré avec Elizabeth.' ('Yes, he is buried with Elisabeth')*24 I conclude that Ken and Elizabeth must be buried in the same place (...). I still asked him, in Debuissou's absence, whether he was aware of other abducted children in the Netherlands. He answered me in the affirmative without giving more details.*25

A week passed before Raemaekers was taken back to Brussels for an interrogation. At the start of it, he enthusiastically shoves a crumpled piece of paper containing scribbles of large circles and arrows under Lesciauskas and Winkel's noses.

- What's this?
- A plan of the place where Elizabeth and Ken are buried.
- Did Focant draw this?
- Yes, at my request.

Raemaekers glows with pride at the silence that follows. He explains further: 'On November 15th, I learned that the bodies were close to the site of the previous excavations. Guy Focant mentioned the number five to me. That number must refer to the location of the buried bodies in the mine passage.

However, I cannot tell you whether this is mine number five, pit number five, mine corridor number five or something else. However, I am formally telling you that the bodies are located in this area. Moreover, to coax more information out of him, I suggested that the searches took place in the Charleroi area. Guy Focant then replied that I was mistaken and that it was in Jumet. I insisted and told him that it was indeed Charleroi. He insisted that he was right and drew a plan for me.'

The following passage is the one which will win over several doubters in the first days of December. 'He spoke to me of an entrance with an elevator used to descend into the mine. Then, he gave me a description of the location of the bodies by drawing a little plan on a piece of paper, which I then copied from memory in my diary. Later, he completed the plan for me when I pretended not to understand. He told me that there was an entrance near the shaft tower. About the shaft tower, I think he specified that it was in bad condition. He then spoke to me of "something yellow" without further clarification.'*26

Raemaekers hands over not one piece of paper but two. One is a vague sketch of the location of Jumet in relation to Roux and Courcelles. The old Saint Louis mine is marked with a cross. That's the little plan Focant drew. He threw it in the garbage can, which Raemaekers discreetly retrieved afterwards. The little map, which marked the location of the bodies, is a copy of a sketch by Focant, which Raemaekers copied later. It says

the entrance to the grave is hidden behind bushes. To get there, one has to follow an asphalt road that ends at a small dirt road. Focant would have driven there himself. Were there no risks involved? Raemaekers asked him. 'I don't care; nobody goes there anyway.' More clues: there is something about the distance of '80 meters'. Where Focant started measuring and where it ended, Raemaekers cannot remember, but Lesciauskas and Winkel note eighty meters. On the 30th of November, Raemaekers can gladden his interrogators again: he has heard Focant say something about 'Revolutionary Street'. And there is now talk of two shaft towers instead of one. Moreover, Focant also released more details about how he abducted Elizabeth Brichet, claims Raemaekers. 'He pressed his hand to her mouth and pulled her into that white van. There, she received a blow that caused her death.' Then, they immediately journeyed to Jumet. 'At the beginning of the week, Focant said word for word that there were other bodies where the police carried out their excavations. Debuissou was there and will be able to confirm that for you. When we were alone, he told me he buried Elizabeth Brichet and little Ken.'*27

The men that café owner Jacky Courard saw walking in and out of the woods in early December were Lesciauskas and Winkel, accompanied by some members of the Disaster Victim Identification team. They came to check Raemaekers' statements against the reality of the terrain and made interesting observations. In Jumet, a "Rue de la Revolution" exists near the old mine. There is also a well with the number five.*28

Since he took over from Connerotte, examining magistrate Jacques Langlois has been under pressure. The fact that a near-revolution in Belgium preceded his appointment has made the magistrate sensitive to what the newspapers write about him. Some publications pointed out that 'not much happens in Neufchâteau anymore'. Among the investigators, there is a kind of urge for action. Every day, they see their colleagues and superiors being criticised live on television in the Dutroux Commission. At the CBO, the flagship of the gendarmerie, they are fully aware that the blunder with Operation Othello will also come up. One would like to

anticipate that storm by getting some results now. The initiative to hold a meeting in Jumet was taken under the impetus of the CBO. The algorithm of their computer program suggested a link between the Raemaekers dossier and some of the statements made by Marc Dutroux and Michèle Martin.

Operation Othello was a hyper-secret enterprise by the Charleroi BOB aimed to catch Dutroux as the kidnapper of Julie and Melissa but never considered it worthwhile to inform their colleague detectives and magistrates in Liège about the wealth of information gathered during the shadow operations carried out regarding Dutroux. Othello was based primarily on anonymous statements by Claude Thirault, to whom Dutroux asked a few times to help with child abductions.

Coincidentally, so many months later, Dutroux accuses Thirault's ex-brother-in-law of abducting children and of hiding the bodies in an old tunnel near his home in nr3 Rue de la Canal, on the edge of the old mine site in Jumet. Michèle Martin has also made statements to this effect.*29

Some reservations apply to these accusations. Both Dutroux and Martin have access to the 86/96 judicial file. They must have discovered that Thirault, their former servant, had been trying to betray them to the gendarmerie since 1992. It was unimportant to them that this led to Operation Othello but nothing else. Thirault is a traitor in the eyes of Dutroux and Martin. You can assume they would be happy to give him a taste of his own medicine. Now, this is an easy statement to make with hindsight, and no one can claim that the searches at Kellner's place should not have taken place. Whether the entire old mine site had to be dug up is less certain. No one seemed to have raised the question of how easy it could have been for Raemaekers to obtain a map of Jumet in his cell, possibly through his lawyer, and then -as he did with Debuissou- to quote "accurate-sounding" data from it.

Searches in the dilapidated hovels on Canal Street yield nothing. The owner is the deaf and elderly Mrs Montreuil. She inhabits a shabby miners' dwelling around the corner and rents the houses in the Kanaalstraat to her daughter Cathy and her husband, Luc Kellner. Mrs Montreuil knows her son-in-law is not soft-hearted, but she has never seen Dutroux over

the floor. 'No, I don't know what exactly they want either,' Mother Montreuil calls into the ear of her even more deaf mother. From a chair in the kitchen, she watches the police officers turn her yard inside out with determined stares in their eyes. 'They're constantly circling an old cistern in the garden,' Cathy grumbles.*30

Her husband, Luc Kellner, presents the detectives with a problem. He leads them around his cellars, full of junk and debris. In house number three, he points out, there once was a connection to a mine shaft, 'but we sealed it with concrete because of the water.' After a long search through a large heap of personal items, Kellner finds another stack of 21 photographs taken of the works to seal the mineshaft. A proud worker grins at the camera. Nothing in these pictures suggests a hold for kidnapped children. A glance into the cellar indicates that extending the search might result in the three hovels collapsing overnight. The investigators leave it at that. 'I don't know Dutroux,' assures Kellner. 'I have never kidnapped children.'*31 The search of the bathroom and bedroom yields the discovery of some illegal weapons and a tear gas bomb, for which the Charleroi BOB opened a separate investigation. But for the Neufchâteau investigation, nothing useful was found in those run-down homes. From that moment on, the BOB only searched the hiding places of the bodies as designated by Jean-Paul Raemaekers on his map of the old mine site in Jumet. 'It was the intention to stop after the Kanaalstraat searches,' says one investigator. 'But just when we had to decide on that, new information came from the prison of Namur.'

One would expect a child killer who learns on the radio that the police are about to discover the mass grave he dug to show some signs of panic. Focant, says Raemaekers, did get jittery but no less talkative. 'The next day, I had the opportunity to learn that he had gone with three accomplices to Jumet to bury Elizabeth Brichet. He told me to reach that mine corridor, one had to venture past a building with broken windows. He specified that this building was inside the old mine site. From that building, one could see occupied houses (...). He explained that they needed waders because the entrance to the tunnel was underwater. Then he entered a smaller corridor, where he

had to crawl on all fours and drag the body behind him (...). Elizabeth's body was not far from little Ken's. The bodies were not wrapped in plastic bags but buried in their clothes. He also told an anecdote: one day, when burying a child with fair hair, they had to hurry because a car was approaching. A couple was looking for a quiet place to make love in their car.'*32

On Saturday, December 14, a day after the start of the second excavation, Francis Debuissou is escorted from his cell nr 66 to appear before the council chamber in Liège. On this occasion, the Brussels Judiciary police question him about his cellmates' dialogues. Debuissou doesn't know anything, it now appears. He pays scant attention to the police officers' inquiries about Jumet, Elizabeth Brichet, Ken Heyrman and Guy Focant. His situation is the only thing that motivates him to engage in a conversation. 'When will I be released?' Only thanks to their persistent patience can the detectives determine something resembling an explanation from his words. Yes, Focant seemed to know something about bodies hidden in Jumet. 'He explained that one had to dig several meters beyond the crater to find them again. He also said that the detection devices of British policeman John Benett were useless because the soil was too slick because of the coal. Focant said he was certain that the bodies of Elizabeth Brichet and Ken Heyrman were in Jumet, along with those of other children whose names he did not mention.'*33

Debuissou also remembers conversations with Focant that shed new light on his alleged role in burying children's bodies. 'I did not hear him say that he went there and hid the bodies himself,' he stresses. 'I also heard him say at one point that he had never been to Jumet. Yes, that was a bit strange. But how could I know those cell conversations were important to the investigation? To me, it seemed more like chitchat to counteract boredom.'

That evening, Francis Debuissou was transferred away to Lantin prison. While setting up an altar at the foot of his new bunk bed, he finds a wad of paper in his pocket. Then he remembers that Raemaekers put it in his hands that morning, on his departure, with the advice: 'This is what you have to do when the police question you. Read it later in the police van,

and then destroy it. Debuissou unfolds it and recognises Raemaekers' patchy script: 'Tell them what you heard from Focant's mouth. Tell them he said he buried children in Jumet.'³⁴ Debuissou sighs and tears up the papers. He settles down in front of his altar and starts his evening prayer.

Colourless Marcinelle, desolate Sars-la-Buissière and smelly Marchienne-au-Pont, the images the average Flemish person ingested of the Walloon part of the country at the end of 1996 - thanks to the Dutroux case- are anything but uplifting. Then, the TV newsreels reinforced that perspective with reports of Satanists operating in Forchies-la-Marche. The mood drops below freezing point the days before Christmas with images of the mine site in Jumet. Meter-deep trenches and mountains of coal dust scar the soil between the bare trees. Diggers shuffle from side to side. Over a hundred investigators hack through the frozen ground, expressing unshakable optimism. The TV newsreels have the same one-liner every night: "Nothing found in Jumet today." A reporter appears on the screen via a remote link, announcing that 'tomorrow could be a crucial day.' In reality, the investigators roam the site like headless chickens. The site maps have been lost in the archives of the old mining company. The investigators have to make do with old postcards of the area, for which they scour the Jumet exchange markets. The 4.5-hectare site has undergone a significant transformation over the years, with the creation of sports grounds and pedestrian walkways. Occasionally, an elderly miner is cajoled from his sofa to show the detectives the way to some entrance. That, too, is of no help. Commander Joan De Winne, head of the DVI, goes into great detail about "something yellow", "the entrance for which you need waders", and "the earthen road". All these elements must be located somewhere but can never be connected.

On the day when turkeys and broiler chickens are thawing all over Belgium in preparation for Christmas, the detectives in Jumet are causing some excitement: they have moved their activities and gear to the back of the slag heap from which a small building with broken windows and a view of the inhabited world comes into view. Meanwhile, temperatures have fallen to well below freezing. Pits that contained water a week earlier are now ice cellars.

During a site visit, Prosecutor Michel Bourlet declared to the press that the search was based on comments made by Dutroux and Martin, which was a white lie "in the interest of the investigation." Minister Stefaan De Clerck and public prosecutor Thierry Marchandise from Charleroi also put in a personal attendance to encourage the investigators in Jumet. The visit is a welcome distraction for the press, who have been twiddling their thumbs in Jumet for days. Journalists report every day that nothing has happened because they've all been informed at the onset that they expected their excavations to yield results in a matter of days. A few indiscreet detectives assured them of this outcome, or it was promoted by Raemaekers' lawyer himself - in an atmosphere of extreme secretiveness.

- Is it true that seven child corpses are buried there in Jumet?
- Seven? Let me think. Elizabeth, Ken, the one from Flanders... I always forget her name.
- Nathalie Geijsbregts?
- Could be. I'm bad at names. If I'm not mistaken, there were six or seven Belgian victims and at least five German boys the same age as Ken. That makes, in total, eleven or twelve child victims.

This conversation dated from early January 1997 and took place in the office of lawyer Jean-Marie Flagothier. At that time, he received more journalists and, in doing so, induced an atmosphere of fear of a constitutional apocalypse. 'It was rather important that we could pull Raemaekers away from Jean-Paul Dumont's sphere of influence,' says Raemaekers' lawyer. 'Only then was he put back on the right path.'³⁵

Let's return for a moment to the interrogation on the 15th of December, shortly after the cell 66 inmates learned that excavations had resumed in Jumet. Raemaekers once again pulls new "evidence" out of his hat: 'In the first instance, on Saturday 14 December around 11.30 a.m. to be precise, Guy Focant asked me not to talk anymore about the Elizabeth Brichet case nor to ask any more questions about it. He gave me the impression of being very tormented. In the afternoon,

he asked me if I could put the cops on a false trail. I asked him if this had anything to do with the digging in Jumet. He replied: yes. I told him this was within my abilities but that he should give me a place to "redirect the cops to". He told me that the goal was to get them to stop digging at the current site, preferably as far as possible, to the region of Liège. He offered me a sum of 1 million (Belgian) francs to propagate this false information (...). I said I would agree to mislead the police in exchange for the payment of 1 million francs.'*36

The BOBs Lesciauskas and Winkel are delighted with their witness's insight. If they can get Focant to pay for false information about Jumet, this must prove that the old man has something to hide there. From a police logic, that's worth almost as much as a confession. If Focant pays, it will only come down to confronting the man during an interrogation. The BOB officers instruct Raemaekers to accept the proposal as quickly as possible. On Wednesday, 18th December, he was already on the phone. Everything is fine, he assures them. Focant listens attentively to the news reports on Jumet and has commented on them with yet another historical statement: 'They are stupid not to find anything, but so much the better.' He has now agreed with Focant that he will contact an intermediary to hand over an advance of 200,000 francs at a location yet to be determined. Raemaekers will, in turn, post an intermediary there - someone from the BOB, of course - to receive the money. Raemaekers can report in between that Focant is already talking about 'seven bodies' and that that of Ken Heyrman is two and a half meters away from that of Elizabeth Brichet.*37

On the evening of December 21st 1996, police officers wait around the Pont de Fragnée in Liege. They have set up a command post in a house at 59 Degneffelaan. Cursing the cold, Brussels BOB officer Michel De Mulder stands in the middle of the bridge. He visibly lets a copy of Het Laatste Nieuws bulge from his coat pocket. Per Raemaekers' instructions, he arrived punctually at 5.30 pm by cab and is waiting for the two contacts. Two people, Raemaekers affirmed. One will hand over the money; the other will monitor the surroundings.*38 In the days leading up to the rendezvous, according to Raemaekers, Focant walks around restlessly, downs

tranquillisers, and has conversations with chaplain Marcel Hock, to whom he confessed the kidnapping of Elizabeth and Ken. 'He confided to the chaplain that seven bodies are buried in a mine tunnel—seven in a row. *39

The detectives waited for half an hour. No one has come to speak to De Mulder. Since thirty minutes is the upper limit for being late by crime world standards, the police officers leave. 'What a stupid thing to do,' Raemaekers exclaims when he sees an opportunity to call the BOB from the prison that evening. 'Focant just called his contact. They were stuck in the evening rush hour and didn't reach the rendezvous point until a quarter past six.'*40

The realisation that something must be wrong with this informant first dawned on the investigators at the mine site itself. None of the leading officers on the spot has ever directly dealt with Raemaekers. None of them knows what kind of crazy figure is leading them through the mining landscape. The only information Joan De Winne and Lieutenant Vinassa of the civil protection team possess is from the faxes arriving in their command car. They contain a summary of Raemaekers' interrogations. Just before Christmas, a rough sketch of a child size sandal is sent to that fax machine. The original was drawn on a prison envelope, which Raemaekers had triumphantly waved about earlier that day in the interrogation room. According to Raemaekers, the sandal belongs to one of the children buried in Jumet, presumably Elizabeth Brichet. It was lost when the little body was buried there, Raemaekers claims to have found out. 'So if you dig up a body, you should find a matching sandal on one of the feet. He even drew it, which I hereby hand over to you.'

Although it should be clear by now to Focant that Raemaekers is in contact with the investigators -why else would he offer him a million to put them on a false trail- he continues to produce drawings and provide details about the location of the bodies. 'This week I learned that a total of eleven bodies lie in that mine corridor,' Raemaekers told the police investigators on 22nd December. And as far as the mass grave is concerned -because that is what it is by now- he seems to want to give them some hope again: 'I have heard that there is an illegal dump near there. The site is large and relatively flat (...). The

mine corridor is easily accessible. There is a floor close to the entrance. He also told me that the mine passage is close to the surface and that you must go up or down there.'*41

A few days later, while his colleagues in the command car study maps, looking for a clandestine dump and a stone floor, a detective quietly takes in the sandal's drawing. 'Say, wasn't Elizabeth Brichet kidnapped in December?' he asks aloud. 'Since when do children wear sandals in the middle of winter?'

Meanwhile, at the Brussels BOB, they finally took the trouble to find out with whom Focant had been calling since December 19. Especially with his wife, it seems. Focant called her every two days, each time for a little over ten minutes, which was also the case on December 21 at 7:14 p.m., twenty minutes before Raemaekers announced that his go-betweens had been stuck in a traffic jam. Immediately afterwards, a phone call went from Mrs Focant's house to a pizzeria nearby Esneux. There are only two possibilities: either Mrs Focant was in the mood for a pizza that evening, or the pizzeria was the starting point of an ingenious chain of contacts.*42 Although many magistrates nowadays do this for far less, no phone calls were ever tapped in dossier 111/96. If they had been, it would immediately have become apparent that Mrs Focant did nothing more than order a pizza that evening.

On December 31, Claude Jasselette is again taken to cell 66. It is a pity, the investigators think, that no third detainee was present during the conversations about the money transfer. That way, they might have learned what truly happened then. From the few occasions the investigators had communication with their witness in the last week of 1996, they found that Focant wanted them to dig on a wasteland in Sclessin (nearby Liege) - 'where the diggers would immediately sink into the mud' - and that there was brief talk of a new meeting, set for Friday December 27th, at the less crowded noon hour at a bus stop on the Zénobe Grammesquare in Liege. On January 6th, during his subsequent interrogation, Raemaekers says that Focant again called his contact and returned with this message: 'Forget the whole thing and tell your cops that I'm not getting involved.'

It dawned on Raemaekers that the entire adventure in Jumet could land him into trouble. One can spot a true fantasist by his capacity for anticipation: 'I heard from a prison guard that the police unit numbers in Jumet were reduced to fifty and that they still hadn't found anything. To see his reaction, I informed Guy Focant (...). His reaction was: 'They are deliberately digging in the wrong place because certain politicians protect Nihoul.'*43

As a New Year's gift, Raemaekers, Focant and Jasselette receive a television set in their cell on January 4th. Every evening, they now watch the (French-Belgian) RTL-TVi channel newsreel. Shortly after that, the entire corps of journalists are invited by Neufchâteau to the Jumet Police headquarters to see the maps for the mine site. The journalists are surprised: they are not used to hospitality from the police. Large info boards were set up at the police HQ, with enlarged old mine maps. While architects and surveyors provide expert commentary, a few investigators watch the RTL-TVi camera operator. The plan is simple: get the crew to capture and show a map of the mine site. Maybe Focant is even stupid enough to indicate the location of the children's grave with his finger on the screen. The plan fails. RTL-TVi does not consider the mine site maps of any interest.

'Now don't despair,' Raemaekers tried to cheer up his interrogators. What do you want me to say? While you men are having fun in the open air, I am sharing a cell with the most dangerous man in Belgium. With every bite I take, he could poison me. I hardly sleep a wink at night either.' In an ultimate attempt to prove he is right, Raemaekers (R) now uses a dictaphone to record a conversation with Focant (F) on tape. We listen to the voices recorded in cell 66 during the news broadcast of RTL-TVi on January 9th, 1997.:

F: Ha, at least now I see where it is!

R: And... what did you go there to do?

F: Oh, just taking a stroll.

R: Ahaa!!!

F: Why is that forbidden?

R: No, but it's a strange place to go for a walkabout.

F: Cut it out. I don't feel like arguing right now.*44

The BOB people always assumed that Raemaekers was very subtle and cunning in his interrogation of Focant. This recording suggests otherwise. Judging from what Guy Focant says here, it seems certain that Jumet had been the topic of conversation in cell 66 before. The detectives have known that for a long time, thanks to Debuissou's statement. Talking about Jumet is not the same as confessing to having buried a dozen child corpses there - no matter how much Raemaekers may wave the tape around as being 'the proof'.

'Actually, after only two weeks, it looked certain that we had been fooled,' a detective reflects. 'The failure of the undercover operation and the discovery that Focant had only called his wife should have us decide to drop the inquiry. However, the investigation was under too much pressure from "public opinion" back then. So, the leadership chose to continue the excavations at the mine site against our better judgment.

On January 16th 1997, the newspapers La Dernière Heure and La Lanterne broke the news embargo imposed by Bourlet. It happened on the very day that Marie-Noëlle Bouzet and Tiny Mast visited the works in Jumet, which increased the anger of the investigators. The information published by these papers so far was not very specific. Still, it contained sufficient elements for Focant to understand what was happening at the site. Focant was immediately placed in a separate cell that morning, to be transferred to Lantin two days later. The leak triggers house searches at the homes of the mother and daughter of Focant's and his gay boyfriend's home. The results were three times negative.*45 Now, that in itself does not mean anything: the house of Focant had already been searched four months earlier, after the testimony of the butcher's assistant, and even then, no clues were found that hinted at any contact with Michel Nihoul, nor with any paedophile groups.*46

The kingpins of paedophilia networks usually have expensive lawyers with shady pasts on retainer. The woman who provides Guy Focant with legal assistance does not fit that template. She lives around the corner from him and runs a fair practice. She has barely followed the reports on Jumet. The name Raemaekers did ring a bell to her at the end of January

'97. 'Coincidentally, my client mentioned this man during our last contact,' she says. He introduced himself to my client as a bank director and asked to be addressed as Alexandre. In prison, he did nothing but brag about his connections within the gendarmerie. Supposing my client had something to hide, Raemaekers would have been the last person with whom he shared his secrets. That man Raemakers is crazy.'*47

On January 20th, the police interrogate Claude Jasselette. Although he spent far less time in cell 66 with Focant and Raemaekers than Francis Debuissou, he seems a little more grounded. Jasselette, however, is just as surprised as Focant's lawyer: 'During the time I spent with Focant in the cell, at no time did I hear from him a reaction or a comment that made me assume that he could be involved in any of the facts that happened at that place (...). I can tell you, however, that Focant was quiet when the radio or television reported on them. I must also tell you that I talked extensively about the excavations with Raemaekers, but Focant did not participate in our conversations.' A confrontation with Debuissou's statement -who heard Focant say that Elizabeth Brichet and Ken Heyrman are buried in Jumet- does not change Jasselette's mind: 'In my presence, Focant never said anything of the sort.'*48

With the removal of Focant from cell 66, Raemaekers' role has been played out. He is no longer a key witness. On January 30th, in the early evening, he calls the BOB to ask when they will come and take him away again for an interrogation. 'Not for the time being,' was the answer. Raemaekers called back five minutes later. 'I still have several pieces of information,' he exclaims. 'By the way, several media have contacted me in the meantime. And I will respond to that request on two conditions: the payment of 1 million francs and a reduction of my sentence to fifteen years.' To the question of a BOB officer how a journalist could arrange for his sentence to be reduced, Raemaekers answers that they have 'many and various contacts with magistrates, spouses of magistrates, brothers, cousins and nieces.' The conversation ends with a deep, nervous sigh on Raemaekers' part: 'I'm starting my fifth year in prison, you know. I have been punished enough, I think.'*49

Of all the people involved in the side investigations, only one person can supply some meaningful about Raemaekers: Regina Louf (witness X1). Adjutant Patriek De Baets presented her with a photograph of the man during an interrogation in December. She promised to transmit what she remembered of him by fax. She sent her notes in mid-February before the press had mentioned anything about Raemaekers. Regina Louf does not appear to know the story about Focant, which indicates that the detectives have not fed her any information.

"Hi. You asked me if I could tell you more about Mister Pedo, and I will try. As I said, he is a true paedophile or paedosexual, to put it in new terms. He is unstable, constantly angling for attention, but at the same time, he is cunning and fond of games. Therefore, I am convinced he is playing a real game of cat and mouse with you. This is one of the reasons why he has never made it to the core (of the paedo network), although that was his ambition. By the way, don't underestimate him. He may have been caught for 'ordinary' paedophilia, but that doesn't mean he didn't kill children. Those children: he might know the places where they were buried... have you considered that maybe he knows them a little too well? He talks too much for my taste. He wants to convey roughly where they are, but not exactly. Yet no core network contact was inconsiderate enough to divulge to Raemaekers where they took the bodies. I'll make it even more specific: they didn't even tell each other. Let alone to a man who boasted about it (...).

In the Netherlands, I don't know exactly where, he had a select circle of friends who brought many children there, in a flat specially furnished for those purposes (...). There was a problem, however: Nihoul, Tony and the rest of his criminal contacts were not pedosexuals. They belonged to a different category. They only took children because it helped them gain power. Paedophilia in itself meant nothing to them. Unless there was something to be gained, of course... Mister Pedo never understood that they only used him as a peripheral figure who delivered (children), just like Marc, Weinstein, and many others. (...) He just delivered to them and set up a small business in his private circle. They made their movies for the "general public,"

shall we say. They had a sub-network, and he had much to do with it. (...) I can only conclude that if he knows where children are buried, he is more closely involved than he wants to admit. He enjoys it, this interest, don't forget that. And he knows that he can send you on a fool's errand. (...). They certainly didn't just tell him where they dumped the kids' corpses; you can be sure of that."*50

In mid-February, journalists still called to learn more about 'crown witness' Raemaekers. No one knew how to portray him so eloquently as Regina's fax to de Baets. In Jumet, a mere fifteen or so officers were still digging. For a moment, there is a burst of excitement after discovering "ouverture 0.54". That spot had recently been completely rebuilt and must correspond more or less to a compilation of what Raemaekers had told us in the weeks. When nothing was found there either, Langlois brought in a bunch of scientists who overwhelmed the press with announcements about gravimetry, seismographic measurements, the study of electrical resistance and 'the method of electromagnetic field variation'. By mid-February, Neufchâteau also engaged two psychics. After a few weeks, the scientists had mapped out more or less the entire subsoil but found nothing to encourage further digging. Spring has come, and the search for a mass grave no longer resembles the desolation at the turn of the year. The birds are singing, leaves appear on the trees, and Jumet looks much less gloomy.

On the early morning of May 5th, 1997, the doorbell rings at nr 59 Chainia Street in Meux. Francis Debuissou had been a free man for several weeks by then. The children are living with him again; cell 66 is only a bad memory.*51 Not for long. 'Come with me', some gendarmes snarl at him. Debuissou is blindfolded and spends hours in the backseat of a police van and a waiting room. He is ordered out of the van after yet another ride, still blindfolded. He can sniff the scent of the forest and feels uneven ground under his feet. 'Loosen up his blindfold,' someone says. He blinks and surveys a mess of mud and coal dust.

- Is it here?
- What do you mean?
- Was it here that children's bodies were buried?

- Sir, I don't know what you're talking about.
- Jumet's excavations, never heard of them?
- Yes, but I don't know anything about it. I've never been here.

It is not entirely clear who had the idea of bringing about the apotheosis of dossier 111/96 in this way. More than twenty investigators look on curiously. Investigating judge Langlois and substitute Pavanello have come from Neufchâteau.

Cameras record all the movements and remarks of the former occupants of cell 66. But the reaction of the first of the three, Francis Debuissou, is rather disappointing. It is a deep well, I must say," he says as soon as he has harmonised himself with the light and the rest of the absurd situation. He can only reaffirm that he once heard Focant say that Elizabeth Brichet and Ken Heyrman are buried nearby. 'I never took what was said there seriously,' says Debuissou. 'And I still don't.'⁵² Expectations rise when Jean-Paul Raemaekers is led to the scene. He had been waiting impatiently in the gendarmerie barracks in Jumet all morning.

He complained to the gendarmes who took him to the forest that he had spent hours in the dark without food, drink, or a loo break, nothing! His mood changes when he also picks up the sound of birdsong. Before anyone can take off his blindfold, Raemaekers is jumping around like a Cossack dancer. He screams: 'I can feel it! The children must be near here!' He takes a few steps, loses his balance while skipping, and nearly ends up in a well. 'I'm sure of it,' the ex-crown witness stammers. 'A small building, an elevator the miners used to descend, a paved road and wait.... the wellies, of course! Where are our boots? Then we'll have to continue on all fours.' As if to reinforce his words, he goes down on his knees and moves to wave his arms, forgetting he is handcuffed. The camera pans left and right to follow his movements. 'Three feet to the left, two steps down, then to the right... Ooooh, I'm disoriented!'

The performance of the blindfolded Raemaekers lasts an hour and a half. Investigating magistrate Langlois stands there shuffling uncomfortably; here and there, a detective chuckles. While Raemaekers throws himself wholeheartedly into his role

as a ballet dancer, a silent figure detaches himself from the group and starts to roll a cigarette in the distance. It is Commander Joan De Winne. He has seen enough. The situation has already become more than embarrassing when blind man number three comes stumbling along: Guy Focant. The old paedophile from Comblain-au-Pont doesn't budge. When his blindfold is removed, he turns to Langlois. 'Your Honour, I swear to you: I have not killed any children.' A fight threatens when Focant and Raemaekers catch sight of each other. 'That bastard is not getting in the car with me!' Raemaekers shouts.*53

That evening, Commander De Winne and Lieutenant Soumoy step out in front of the waiting journalists with apparent reluctance. These two police spokesmen, otherwise so synchronised, made utterly contradictory statements. The reality is that they dug themselves a hole. Their search has been met with increasingly loud jeers from their colleagues in recent weeks. After the spectacle of this afternoon, there is not much doubt left: Jumet was a red herring.

The chaplain about whom Raemaekers proclaimed that Focant had gone to confession with him is still being questioned. He can recall nothing of the sort.*54 A photo that appeared in *La Dernière Heure* in October 1996 on the occasion of the first excavations shows the toppled yellow sign of which Raemaekers spoke. A careful reading of what he said about the operation of the old mine -with horses and counterweights- makes it clear that he probably got this from a tourist brochure. Claude Jasselette, who bunked with Raemaekers for months in cell 66, states in mid-April that the latter proposed to him to arrange for his criminal file to be stolen from the registry of Namur for 30,000 Belgian francs. Jasselette gives a detailed description of how two mercenaries armed with Uzis, a Frenchman and a Spaniard, would make their move on the night of April 19-20th. 'Raemaekers' lawyer Flagothier is certainly involved', says Jasselette, indicating that this is always the case in everything Raemaekers undertakes. Raemaekers tries to tie as many detainees as possible to his lawyer, which also happens to Jasselette: 'The only time I had the chance to meet a lawyer in the consulting room, it was Flagothier in the presence of Raemaekers, which is forbidden. Because of this, I can say that Master Flagothier provides

information to Raemaekers both orally and in writing. I would also like to specify that Raemaekers sees his lawyer weekly and practically always returns to the cell with documents, photocopies and information concerning all his accusations. He then diligently notes these down in his little blue notebook.*55

A week after the confrontation, Guy Focant sends an open letter through his lawyer. This letter sheds new light on the knowledge that Raemaekers displayed about coal mines:

"During my stay in the same cell as Raemaekers, he was regularly taken away for questioning. He presented it as if he were helping the detectives to dismantle a network of paedophiles operating in the highest layers of society (...). I was not worried about his precise and detailed questions about the Jumet coal mine. He also raised these questions with a prison warden who lives in this region (...). Raemaekers continues to make untrue accusations, insisting that I would have told him certain things. I've been asked thousands of questions. How can I respond since it was my first time seeing a coal mine? I am devastated and shocked at all these questions about hypothetical child corpses and the fact that people associate me with this horror (...). In the meantime, and for reasons I don't know, the digging continues on imaginary charges. The money is probably all wasted, and my life is in danger."*56

On May 27th 1997, the excavations came to a halt. Jacques Langlois came to Jumet in person, stated at a press conference that a total of 6,090,000 cubic meters of earth had been moved since December 13th 1996, and explained that the job of an investigating magistrate was essentially to "see what is behind the doors before closing them." He thanked all the investigators and emphasised that he and no one else took full responsibility for this episode. The public prosecutor in Neufchâteau afterwards shows surprisingly little interest in the question of who is truly responsible for this derailment of the investigation: Raemaekers alone, Raemaekers and Focant, Raemaekers and Flagothier or Flagothier and outsiders? And why?

Several police officers who poured their hearts and souls into the investigations of Nihoul and X1 received punishment

afterwards. So far, no one has even suggested whether an 'investigation of the investigation' for the Jumet chapter might be appropriate.

NOTES:

1. Interview with Jacky Courard, December 13, 1996.
2. Lelièvre believes that Dutroux dug pits in his house at Marchienne-au-Pont, hoping to find coal. Interrogation Michel Lelièvre, BOB Neufchâteau, August 17th, 1996, PV 100.221.
3. The first excavations began on October 4 and ended on October 18th, 1996.
4. Interview with Tiny Mast, January 1997.
5. Interview of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 15 December 1996, PV 117.130.
6. Letter from Jean-Paul Raemaekers to the authors, June 10, 1997.
7. Reconstruction is based on conversations with Jean-Paul Raemaekers.
8. Fax from BOBs Lesciauskas and Winkel to Connerotte, October 9, 1996.
9. Interview of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 19 October 1996, PV 115.439.
10. Interview with prosecutor Franskin, December 1996.
11. Correctional Court of Hoei, 9th February 1996.
12. Interrogation Jean-Yves H., police Liege, 16 September 1996, PV 63.901.
13. Interrogation of Guy Focant, Brussels GP, September 18, 1996, PV 10.488.
14. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, Brussels BOB, 19 October 1996, PV 115.439.
15. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, Brussels BOB, 29th October 1996, PV 115.442.
16. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, Brussels BOB, 9 November 1996, PV 115.445.
17. Reconstruction is based on a conversation with Francis Debuissou on 22 June 1997.

18. Philippe Brewaeys and Jean-Frédérick Delière in *Le Soir Illustré*, 29 October 1997.
19. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, Brussels BOB, 1 November 1996, PV 115.444.
20. Brussels BOB, 1st November 1996, PV 115.444.
21. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, Brussels BOB, 9th November 1996, PV 115.445.
22. We met Laurent and Emmanuel on June 22nd, 1997, and presented the children with a photograph of lawyer W. The boys assured us they had never seen this man. They did recognise Janselette. He accompanied Potemberg on night outings in the centre of Namur and on vacation in Ostend in the summer of 1996.
23. 'What a bunch of simpletons; they didn't go far enough.'
24. 'Yes, he was buried with Elizabeth.'
25. Interrogation Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 15 November 1996, PV 117.123.
26. Interrogation Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 23 November 1996, PV 117.125.
27. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 30 November 1996, PV 117.126.
28. Synthesis, BOB Brussels, December 5, 1996, PV 117.128.
29. Summary report, Marche-en-Famenne BOB, December 12, 1996, PV 100.416.
30. Interview with mother and daughter Montreuil during the house search, December 13, 1996, Canal Street 3, Jumet.
31. Interrogation of Luc Kellner, BOB Marche-en-Famenne, December 13, 1996, PV's 100.419 and 100.420.
32. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, December 15, 1996, PV 117.130.
33. Interrogation of Francis Debuissou, BOB Brussels, 14 December 1996. The man repeated his story later: BOB Brussels, 28 January 1997, PV 150.132.
34. Interview with Francis Debuissou, 22 June 1997.
35. Interview with Jean-Marie Flagothier, January 1997.
36. Interview of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 15 December 1996, PV 117.130.
37. BOB Brussels, 18 December 1996, PV 117.131.
38. BOB Brussels, 18 December 1996, PV 118.636.

39. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 22 December 1996, PV 117.132.
40. BOB Brussels, 21 December 1996, PV 118.639.
41. 10. Interrogation of Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 22 December 1996, PV 117.132.
42. 11. BOB Brussels, 6 January 1997, PV 100. 164.
43. 12. Interrogation Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, 6 January 1997, PV 100. 162.
44. 13. Interrogation Jean-Paul Raemaekers, BOB Brussels, January 21, 1997, PV 100.512.
45. 14. BOB Brussels, January 16, 1997, PV's 100.501, 100.505.
46. 15. BOB Liege, 18 September 1996, pv 104.351.
47. 16. Interview with lawyer Marianne Goyens, 29 January 1997.
48. 17. Interview with Claude Jasselette, BOB Brussels, January 20, 1997, PV 100. 508.
49. 18. BOB Brussels, January 30, 1997, PV 150,169.
50. 19. Fax Xl to Brussels PDB, 12 February 1997, PV 151.262.
51. 20. However, Debuissou was sentenced to 18 months in prison by the disciplinary court of Namur on June 21. The fact that his name was repeatedly linked in the press to the excavations in Jumet and that there was always talk of "three paedophiles" in that context meant that the judge hardly bothered to listen to the arguments of the defence. Debuissou's wife was convicted in one go, to 12 months in prison without her being charged prior. Debuissou was unhappy with how Master Flagothier represented his interests and eventually found another lawyer. The convictions have since been appealed.
52. 21. Interrogation Francis Debuissou, BOB Brussels, May 5, 1997, PV's 151.412 and 151.413.
53. 22. Reconstruction was based on interviews with Debuissou and Raemaekers and detectives who were present at the time.
54. 23. Interview of Marcel Hock, Brussels BOB, 14 May 1997, PV 151.448.
55. 24. Interview Claude Jasselette, Judicial Police Namur, 14 April 1997.
56. 25. Guy Focant press release, 13 May 1997.

5 Spring 1997

Additional Witnesses

1 'This is Anthony, a friend of Nihoul.'

Witness Nathalie W., confronted with a photograph of Tony V., November 2nd 1996.

February 15th 1997, Ovifat, German-speaking Belgium. At the reception of the fancy Domaine des Hautes Fagnes, the night-duty receptionist is focused on a crossword puzzle. There is no snow this year. There are hardly any tourists. At two in the morning, however, someone stumbles into the hotel: a anxious young woman with a swollen face. The receptionist had seen her leave an hour and a half earlier. She goes straight to her room.

- Nathalie! Where were you?
- The network called me through the pager. Marie-France, that's how they always do it! They type in a town's postcode and then wait for me at the station of that town. This time, it was 4970: Verviers. It was already almost midnight. I took a cab.
- What happened to your face?
- Claudio... He hit me. He wanted to know about the investigation. There were three of them. Claudio hit me, but I didn't say anything.
- And then?
- Then they let me go.

- Marie-France Botte doesn't know what to think. Strange things happened that night. Just after midnight, the phone rang twice in her room. Nothing was said, only hung up. When she went to look in Nathalie's room, it was empty. 'Did you call me just now?' she asks. Nathalie shakes her head and starts to cry.

Marie-France Botte has been fighting child prostitution in Thailand for years. This has brought her fame, recognition and even elevation to the peerage. The Belgian public only really got to know her in August 1996. She is an eloquent speaker, saying precisely the things that resonate with the Belgians and she was invited to one TV studio after another. The "Opérations Marie-France Botte" account receives more money than she can spend. Part of that money, 545,183 francs precisely, was paid to support and provide shelter for Nathalie W.*1. For Botte, the 28-year-old woman is a welcome expense and a retroactive source of information. Slightly overconfident, the Baroness boasted in September 1996 that she had a list of Dutroux's clients. With the cameras on her, she entered the courthouse in Neufchâteau with this promise. Only later did prosecutor Bourlet declare that Baroness Botte never handed him any list.

Marie-France Botte met Nathalie W for the first time in December. She was all ears when she realised that this was one of those witnesses from the Neufchâteau investigation that everyone was so secretive about. She listened to Natalie about the inquiry and promised to help as much as she could. And she had the contacts and means to do so. It turned out that Botte had admirers at the Brussels BOB, too. 'When I went there the last time, a giant poster of Marie-France hung on the wall,' Nathalie W states later. The reason why the two women spent Valentine's weekend together in Ovifat is unusual. Marie-France Botte would question Nathalie W. 'Is she giving you trouble? Leave her to me,' she had said to the investigators. Women among themselves work better. And yes, afterwards, she would prepare a report for the BOB—a list.

When Botte visited the BOB on February 17th 1997, her message was not very hopeful: 'That woman is batshit crazy.' A small dose of simple logic brought Botte a long way. 4970, the postal code with which Nathalie was called to the Verviers

station by 'her pimp Claudio' via the pager, was the postal number of Stavelot. So why did Nathalie go to the Verviers station? BOB Philippe Pourbaix enthusiastically continued to search and found the cab driver who had picked up Nathalie in front of the hotel that night. She indeed wanted to catch a train, but since there was no station in either Stavelot or Malmédy, it had become Verviers, the driver remembers. 'She still asked me what the region's postal code was,' he recalls. According to the cab man who took her back to the hotel, Nathalie wandered for an hour at the Verviers station.*2 She was alone the whole time. She was not injured, at least not to her face. Apparently, just before returning to the hotel, Nathalie hit herself a few times. The BOB officers traced the origin of the phone calls that Marie-France Botte received in her hotel room. Both calls came from the public phone booth right across Verviers station.' Nathalie W also arranged the pager call and the bruises on her face, as found out later. When the "Moulin" case was closed on April 25th 1997, Nathalie was an object of ridicule among the investigators.

Initially, however, her testimony was considered more important than anything else. Nathalie was an "X witness" *avant la lettre*. In February 1996, six months

before the Dutroux case, she had already approached an inspector of the Brussels Judiciary Police together with her therapist. She spoke about her father, who raped her for the first time when she was six. Later, she says, he lent her to friends and relatives at parties in villas in and around Waterloo. The interrogation ended with a shrug from the police officer: 'I can't write this down.' Nathalie had walked away angrily without signing her statement. Four months later, she had more success. After a chance meeting with her therapist, Brussels BOB officers Joël Gérard and Théo Vandyck did take the time to listen. On July 6th 1996, they drew up a detailed report in which Nathalie outlined the network that abused her for years. A long enumeration followed of surnames and first names - especially first names. When she was ten, Nathalie recounted, her father emigrated to Spain and delivered her to one Vincent, aged forty and six feet tall. He took her as a young teenager to sex parties in castles in Wallonia and Flemish Brabant. Three times she was pregnant -

one time by her father -three times terminating with an abortion.

Later, a discussion started about whether Nathalie spoke about 'Mich from Brussels' that day. What is certain is that following the arrest of Michel Nihoul, it only took a matter of days before all the documents concerning Nathalie W were handed over to the public prosecutor of Neufchâteau. 'Officer Joel called me to ask if "Mich" was Nihoul. Yes, I said. I recognised him immediately on TV. I did not see him as the most important person. He was there during the period of the Atrebatenstraat when I was fifteen to sixteen. That was all.'*3 With Nathalie W, the interrogations were even more difficult than with the X-witnesses. The silences last even longer; now and then, she announces that she 'can't take it anymore'. Sometimes, she loses herself in aimless stammering, becomes hysterical and declares that what she said earlier was made up. 'You had to be patient with her,' Théo Vandyck recalled. 'But when you consider what she was able to tell us at an early stage of the investigation, you know: she knows those milieus which interested us so much at the time through and through.'

At the beginning of September 1996, Nathalie W talks for the first time about the former private club in the Atrebatenstraat in Etterbeek. It is indeed an address where Nihoul had been a regular customer. 'It was a meeting place for the perpetrators,' says Nathalie. 'I have seen other children there.' Nathalie points out one of The Dolo's regular customers, which detectives later discover is related to a travel agency known for sex trips to Thailand. Before the media reported on the case, she identified several other clients and pointed out their villas. She also believes she once saw Bernard Weinstein at The Dolo.*4 Later, she talks about an address in Etterbeek where she claims to have been raped. It turns out that the location in Rue Dietrich had a bad reputation with the Etterbeek police for sexual offences.*5

In one of her statements, Nathalie W also mentions members of the de Borchgrave family as intimate friends of Vincent - or whatever his name might be.*6 The investigators don't seem to care, and Nathalie W doesn't appear to know the story. Still, the family in question was heavily compromised in the early 1990s because one of its descendants married a young Jewish American woman.

After the divorce and her subsequent return to the US, she wrote a book about her experiences. Sheri Heller, aka Baroness Sheri de Borchgrave, portrayed the part of the Belgian nobility that she got to see as highly perverse. During her years in Belgium, she says, she was dragged from sex party to sex party by her husband, witnessed incest and was forced into partner exchange. Her temporary relatives told her taboo-laden stories about a very young maid who had met her end during one of the parties.*7 It could be that Nathalie W once overheard something about this, but it is not very evident. The de Borchgrave family had the book immediately withdrawn from sale.

Many are inclined to believe Nathalie when she claims in the first few weeks that 'the network' is closely following the investigation into her claims. Nathalie complains of threats and anonymous phone calls. On October 14th 1996, an unknown man assaulted her in a parking lot along the freeway in Bettincourt. The authorities circulated a robot photo based on her description, which led Nathalie to recognise Jean-Louis Delamotte in a photograph - Nihoul's partner in the Asco car company. Detectives notice someone carved a 'V' into her arm with a knife. A memento of Vincent, Nathalie says. He, too, came out of the woodwork to "advise" her against making any further statements. A second incident follows on a motorway, the ring road around Brussels. A woman claimed a man in a green car tried to run her off the road. She claims to have been chased by a green car in October 1996. For a moment, a correlation is laid with a complaint made by the Liège prosecutor Anne Thily.*8 Marie-France Botte shares in the blows. A man waited for her in front of her home and tried to strangle her. The Brussels public prosecutor's office opened a separate file on these threats and attacks, but it will be closed after a little over a year without any result.

During interrogation, three female gendarmes and a psychologist were pushed to subjugate and calm down Nathalie W on December 12th. It begins a series of interrogations about extreme sexual sadism, ritual baby killings and something that sounds suspiciously like a black mass. It is the period in which some investigators are fretting in earnest about secret satanic societies with which Dutroux

and Weinstein are alleged to have ties. On January 16th, 23rd and 30th, 1997, Nathalie W was hypnotised in the interrogation room by Dr Mairlot, a specialist in the field. The examination became no less chaotic. 'The baby's blood is mixed with the blood of the slaughtered sheep (...). They burn the baby and the sheep, and everyone makes love to everyone (...). The monster has left. They tear out the baby's heart.'*9 At the end of this session, Nathalie states that she has the impression that she saw the spectacle from different perspectives as if she had experienced it from the perspective of multiple personalities. If there is any truth in what she tells us, it is well possible that this could happen in this way,' Officer Théo Vandyck confides to his colleagues.

Some investigative data cannot be reconstructed. As vehemently as they are later accused of having 'helped' their witnesses, Vandyck and his colleagues maintain to this day that they were rigorously vigilant in ensuring that the X-witnesses could not find anything from their interview with Nathalie. If that is true, a few minor details from the 110/96 file continue to raise questions. In early November 1996, Nathalie was presented with a whole collection of photographs of men and women. The photo of X1 doesn't ring a bell, but she pulls out another: 'This is Anthony, a friend of Nihoul.' The appointed image is that of Tony V.*10 Later, Nathalie W also picks out X4's mother from a series of photos and correctly calls her by her first name. Conversely, both X1 and X4 recognise Nathalie W as a victim. X1, in turn, correctly identifies a photograph of Nathalie's father.

Shortly after the most shocking of the three interrogations under hypnosis in late January, Théo Vandyck is felled by a cerebral haemorrhage. He was the only police officer whom Nathalie W had complete trust. Now, Philippe Pourbaix and Baudouin Dernicourt take over the role of interrogators. They had recently completed the investigation into Marc Dutroux's assets at an astonishingly fast pace. Pourbaix makes no bones about it: he does not believe a single word Nathalie W says. Nathalie reacts in her particular way. She hands the BOB an invitation to a 'sacrifice party' on a piece of paper full of bloodstains and hair. Her name is written in blood. The detectives do not bother to check where the party might take

place. For them, there is no doubt that Nathalie wrote the letter with her blood - which later turns out to be true.

Nathalie W has difficulty dealing with the fact that people take her for a madwoman from one day to the next. Her fuses blow. Claudio, Vincent, the prince... Sometimes, Nathalie W describes one as the right hand of the other, and sometimes, Vincent and the Prince are the same person. Then again, Claudio and Vincent. How can we explain the 'V' carved in her arm if it appears that this person is not called Vincent?' says BOB officer Pourbaix on March 10th 1997, in a report that symbolically torches her testimony.*11 That Dernicourt and Pourbaix are fed up is somewhat understandable. On March 18th, they learned from a friend of Nathalie's that she had gone to explore the castles she claims to have been taken to in advance. She even went to the tourism office to pick up some leaflets.*12 Whether it is true what third parties say about Nathalie W is hardly a concern to Dernicourt and Pourbaix. 'She confessed to a witness that she had stolen her own medical file,' they sounded on March 10. Nathalie W "confessed" earlier that she was once pregnant based on an ultrasound scan. The two BOBs now report that the patient's name has been cut out of the photo, meaning Nathalie faked it.

On March 17th 1997, Nathalie complained to 'Philippe' and BOB's Pourbaix; she continued her established habit of addressing everyone by their first name.

- With Théo, the situation was completely different. He trusted me.
- Then, show us somehow that you're not lying. Give that Claudio of yours a call.
- No, I won't.
- Come on! You gave us three of Claudio's phone numbers. Call him now, here.
- I don't want to! My trust in you is gone. I quit.*13

Philippe Pourbaix's retrospective report on this interview with Nathalie clarifies that he checked Claudio's three so-called phone numbers beforehand and determined they did not exist.

'The attitude that the detectives have adopted in this file is questionable, to say the least,' says lawyer Laurent Arnauts, Nathalie's counsel. 'Nathalie has made things difficult for them, that much is certain. But vice versa is even more so.' Therapist Yves de Keyser, who treated Nathalie W for a while, describes her as a traumatised woman who never processed her past sexual abuse. 'She was not ready to go to court with it. She couldn't see the things she was experiencing clearly.'

Nathalie W herself has no problem admitting that she sometimes played games. 'I admit that no one in Ovifat threatened me,' she says. 'But Marie-France's representation of the facts was also one-sided. We had all the time in the world, so to speak. Well, for Marie-France, it couldn't go fast enough. It was Valentine's Day. Her boyfriend would come over from Brussels on Sunday evening. I was suddenly the third wheel on the wagon. During our last conversation, she looked at her clock all the time. I had to and would name names. Now, right away. It became a mess. I remember someone who was called Deridder or something like that. She asked me if he wore a blue suit. That could be, I said. There you have it, that would be gendarme general Willy De Ridder. She didn't even listen to my protest. The same thing happened to François-Xavier, an offender I only knew from his first name. 'So,' said Marie-France, 'the mayor of Brussels. I shouted that it wasn't about the Donnée at all, but she obviously didn't feel like deleting it.'

As it turned out later, Marie-France Botte consumed thousands of francs of expensive wine with her boyfriend in Ovifat using the funds of her non-profit organisation and spent an entire gastronomic weekend there. I was shocked, says Nathalie W. 'I was exhausted, hoping for an evening of networking. When that friend came, I wanted to leave immediately no matter how. Indeed, I wanted to take the train to Brussels, but it had already left.' Nathalie W dismissed other 'disclosures' about how she would have falsified the examination, 'That ultrasound was indeed mine. I did indeed steal it at the hospital of Braîne-Fallieud; it is the only way I could have got hold of it. No, my name is not on it. But then, abortion was still forbidden, and it was the custom everywhere to leave out the patient's name. Otherwise, those doctors

risked a prison sentence. If the investigators now pretend not to know this, they are being malicious.*14

Laurent Arnauts suggests calling on a psychiatrist, Marc Reisinger, who would later gain notoriety when he became Regina Louf's pre-eminent lawyer. After five consultations, totalling five hours of conversations, Reisinger delivers an unquestionably damning report on Nathalie. He diagnoses her as 'suffering from "pathomimia", a pathological urge to fabricate stories'. He does not even rule out that Nathalie W was 'directed' to sabotage her own case. In Arnaut's eyes, however, Reisinger's report is worthless. 'Reisinger had two meetings of barely three-quarters of an hour with Nathalie, once in the presence of the detectives. For the rest, his report is full of elements that have much to do with gossip but little to do with psychiatry. That man was guided by what the detectives and some journalists told him.

According to Reisinger, Arnauts' reaction highlights the point at which he has been 'fooled' by his client: 'I was asked to provide an opinion on the value of her testimony, not on whether she was a victim or not. I'm afraid I also have to disagree that I let myself be strung along by her interrogators at the time, as Arnauts claims. I was able to work in total independence.' Reisinger pulls up his records showing how often he received Nathalie W for a consultation.

In early March 1997, the BOB started questioning Nathalie's family, ex-boyfriend and neighbours. As expected, the picture they paint of Nathalie is not very positive: she is a compulsive liar, obsessed with a craving for attention... Her mother adds colour to the image by depicting her daughter as a dangerous mythomaniac who tries to destroy people by blaming them for something.*15

She also dismisses the rape claims regarding her ex-husband as fabricated. Her grandmother, brothers and ex-boyfriend support this statement: it is unthinkable that her father harassed Nathalie. Two people were not questioned: Nathalie's father, about whom the Spanish police signalled to the investigators at the beginning of the investigation that 'this man seems to be protected'. His new spouse is also not questioned. She would have contacted Nathalie worryingly from Spain to tell her that her father 'had started again'.

Yet opinions about Nathalie W are less unanimous than the official reports could indicate. After the visit of these investigators, some friends - and even her grandmother - write angry letters to Bourlet and Arnauts. Cécile Z., Nathalie's soulmate, writes: 'Pourbaix kept repeating that everything Nathalie said had been verified and that nothing was true (...). He suggested that I search Nathalie's things and thus carry out my investigation (...).' At the end of her letter, Cécile Z., a policewoman herself, also knows that hard evidence is needed in a judicial inquiry.

But to claim, as Pourbaix did, that Nathalie is a fantasist, a psychopath, a mythomaniac and the greatest manipulator in the world stretches the imagination. These are not interpretations; these are the words I heard literally.*16

Ludmilla D., a psychologist with the foundation Opérations Marie-France Botte, writes that she witnessed several conversations in which the investigators did everything possible to make their witness as seem as crazy and unhinged as possible. In my opinion, this was a set-up, and it concerned false information intended to make the victim unbalanced and make her less credible towards her surroundings.*17 Marie-France Botte is a personal friend of Dernicourt and would have had some conversations with him about Nathalie W Botte, who was also in close contact with Marc Reisinger during that period.

The ambience of the investigation after Vandyck's cerebral haemorrhage is best illustrated by the account of Marie-Christine M., Nathalie's neighbour. On March 19th 1997, a gendarme came to see her and warned her that Nathalie was 'dangerous' and that she should not leave her alone with the children. The gendarme says that he knows this 'from the BOB of Brussels'. When Marie-Christine M. receives a phone call from Pourbaix a few days later, she records the conversation. Pourbaix admits on the tape that he asked the gendarme to warn her. 'You never know what she might do, Pourbaix said. She might repeat the things she went through. Statistics prove that, he added.' Marie~ Christine is shocked at what is happening here and has Nathalie W listen to the recording.

Nathalie immediately calls Pourbaix, demanding an explanation. The only answer is a search of Nathalie's house on April 1st 1997, during which the contested cassette is confiscated. The same day, Philippe Pourbaix calls Marie-Christine M. to inform her that he has found a cassette containing their telephone conversation. 'He threatened to draw up an official report for breaking an investigation's secrecy', Marie-Christine writes in her complaint letter. *18

Laurent Arnauts turns these and other statements over to investigating Judge Langlois and asks for an explanation. He never receives one.

At the beginning of April, Commander Jean-Luc Duterme also interferes with the case. He draws up an official report in which he wants to personally warn the magistrates about 'the behaviour of Nathalie W'. He states that Nathalie W intends to file a complaint against Pourbaix. 'She acts as if the investigation has been covered up and passes on everything she knows about the investigation to friends and family.' Duterme also perceives a risk of a media campaign 'since Nathalie contacts journalists'. Duterme argues that investigators thus run the risk of reprisals. It takes barely two weeks for some campaigns to get underway in the media. Not the one Duterme warned about but against Nathalie W herself. In the eyes of the press, the 31-year-old woman morphs into a symbol of the 'disorganisation' of the investigations in Neufchâteau.

The weekly periodicals and daily newspapers vilify her. Not only is her testimony too far-fetched to be accurate, but Nathalie W is also alleged to have falsified her medical records and to have staged threats. The newspapers eagerly mention how much jail time she risks.

For Théo Vandyck, who was still recovering in mid-1997, it became clear where the press got the mustard. Two days after the RTBf program *Au Nom de la Loi* dragged his witness through the mud in broad strokes, he wrote a long letter to Langlois. He explains that during his recovery, he went from time to time to visit his former colleagues at the antenna-Neufchâteau-and was surprised at the sudden aggression with which some talked about Nathalie. 'Philippe Pourbaix never stopped making fun of the victim for all sorts of bad things,'

said Vandyck. 'According to him, Nathalie was a "whore" (sic). He also tried influencing me by calling Nathalie a 'liar who did nothing but manipulate everyone'. Sometime in May last year, Friday, May 17th, '97, I arrived at the office by 11:45. I wanted to invite my colleagues to dinner (...). Philippe Pourbaix declined my invitation, claiming that he, Baudouin Dernicourt, Yves D'hainaut and Patrick Noller had an appointment with the journalist Philippe Brewaeyts of the weekly *Le Soir Illustré*. To my questions, he replied that he had to defuse the bombs that Nathalie had laid. He explained that she had contacted the media to launch a smear campaign. However, I quickly realised it was the investigators themselves who had started this campaign. Indeed, at that time, articles appeared regularly in the press about several witnesses of Neufchâteau and especially about Nathalie (...). Pourbaix told me he intended to seek out the journalist Gérard Rogge in the same context. Afterwards, writes Vandyck, he phoned Pourbaix again, hoping to bring him to his senses and to point out the dangers of a sanction for breach of professional secrecy. Pourbaix, however, saw no danger of that happening. 'He said he did everything with the approval of the investigating judge and that both Commander Duterme and Colonel Brabant were behind him. They were aware of his actions and approved them as well (...) During this conversation, Philippe Pourbaix informed me that the press now knew the truth and advised me to watch the broadcast of "Au nom de la Loi" because then 'finally" (sic) the i's will be dotted and the t's crossed.*19

As his only response, Vandyck received a short business letter from examining magistrate Langlois with the imperative advice not to interfere any more in the investigation surrounding Nathalie W. Later; it turns out that Pourbaix had indeed received permission from his superiors to spread his views on the entire case to the press. This move is unprecedented, especially considering that the investigators had received a warning a few months earlier that the slightest leak would be punished with instant dismissal. 'It is true that myself and Dernicourt Baudouin, with permission of our hierarchy as well as of examining magistrate Langlois, met certain journalists who Nathalie W. initially approached', he declared at the beginning of 1998 during an interrogation by Committee P.

'She did indeed start to tell 'her story', and it was necessary to rectify it. All this did not happen in May 1997, as Vandyck maintains, but on Wednesday, June 18th 1997, when we met the journalists (...). A report was drawn up for the attention of examining magistrates Langlois and Vandermeersch on January 21 1998.*20 The report is attached to the official report of Pourbaix's hearing. Remarkable: the report dates from a few days after a newspaper reported Vandyck's letter and the fact that members of the Verwilghen Commission are asking serious questions about this state of affairs.*21

Laurent Arnauts is left mystified. The investigators seem to regard Nathalie W as a greater danger to society than the entire Dutroux gang. Dericourt, Noller and Dehainaut filed a complaint against Nathalie W for 'libel and defamation' after she complained in a weekly magazine about how she was treated. This happens - to put it in the proper context - after the salacious stories about her in *Le Soir Illustré* and other media. Pourbaix replaces the standard target with a photograph of Nathalie W. during shooting exercises in the barracks.

Halfway through 1998, the weary woman is no longer interested in making any more witness statements. The 110/96 dossier had already been closed a year earlier. When she finally finds a job in a department store, it is only a few days before the gendarmerie suddenly turns up. At the time, 'she was still in her probationary period', says Arnauts. Up to that point, everything had been handled discreetly, as it should be; they now informed her superiors aloud that she was due to undergo questioning 'in connection with the Dutroux case'. Writing a letter or making a telephone call was suddenly no longer possible. Yet Nathalie can always be reached anywhere on her pager. Of course, she had lost her job.

NOTES:

1. Letter Opérations Marie-France Botte to investigating judge Langlois, April 17, 1997.
2. Information following interview with Marie-France Botte, BOB Brussels, February 17, 1997, PV 150.272.
3. Interview with Nathalie W, November 14 1997.

4. Interview of Nathalie W, BOB Brussels, 5 September 1996, PV 113.788.
5. It concerns a bordello, where couples can rent rooms by the hour—findings BOB Brussels, December 12 96, PV 118.416.
6. Information after interrogation Nathalie W, BOB Brussels, February 11, 1997, PV 150.265.
7. "A dangerous Liaison, Baroness Sheri de Borchgrave, New American Library, 1993". De Standaard Uitgeverij printed a Dutch translation titled "Adel Verplicht", but it was never released. The publisher reached an agreement with the de Borchgrave family about this.
8. Fax Judicial Police Brussels, November 2 1996, included in file 376/96 of investigating judge Vandermeersch.
9. Interrogation of Nathalie W, BOB Brussels, January 30 1997, PV 150.035.
10. Interrogation Nathalie W, BOB Brussels, November 2 1996, PV 116.063.
11. Analysis of statements by Nathalie W, BOB Brussel, March 10 1997, PV 150.521
12. Information from the BOB Brussels, April 18 1997, PV 150.729
13. Reconstruction, based on the Pourbaix report, BOB Brussels, March 17 1997, PV 150.733.
14. Interview with Nathalie W, November 14 1997.
15. Interrogation of Simonne C., BOB Brussels, April 1, 1997 PV 150.941.
16. Letter Cécile Z., 28 April and 28 May 1997.
17. Correspondence from Véronique L. to Laurent Arnauts and prosecutor Bourlet, May 5, 1997.
18. Correspondence from Marie-Christine M. to Marie-France Botte and Laurent Arnauts, April 27 and September 5 1997.
19. Correspondence from Ludmilla D. with Laurent Arnauts, September 7 1997.
20. Hearing of Philippe Pourbaix, Committee P, March 27, 1998, file 3728/98, PV 984,366.
21. De Morgen, January 12, 1998

2. 'Then I choose sixty-nine'.

Witness X69, December 10th 1996.

Besides Regina Louf and Nathalie W, there were five other witnesses. Although only a handful of investigators, magistrates and journalists know their true identities, the denomination "the X" (witnesses) is synonymous with a cabinet of oddities in the eyes of a substantial part of public opinion. All seven witnesses believed that the Dutroux case had created an opportunity to open up about their past to police officers whom they previously mistrusted. 'We only had one thing in common,' says witness X4. 'We wanted to remain anonymous, for the sake of ourselves and our loved ones who often did not even know a fraction of our past.'

Every major criminal investigation consists primarily of testimony. In any investigation where there is a suspicion that the subject of the inquiry is a dangerous gang with a few members still at large, anonymous witnesses turn up. If arrests are made, the suspects are allowed access to their judicial file, exposing the witness's identities and potentially putting them in danger. Every major criminal investigation has witnesses A's, B's or X's. However, for a reason yet to be defined, it was decided at some point that proceedings had to be done differently in the Dutroux case and that there was no place for witnesses in this inquiry.

X2 was unaware of this state of affairs when, one day, during a meeting with the police officers of the public prosecutor's office of Neufchâteau, she heard them talk about X1. 'She cringed,' recalls one of those present. X2 worked for a police department and was involved in a part of the Dutroux investigation. This lady from Walloon-Brabant was known as very competent, motivated and upbeat. 'It was the stupidest decision of my life,' she said later. She spoke to Master Sergeant Michel Clippe, whom she knew well. He persuaded her to testify. Prosecutor Bourlet was one of the few individuals who knew X2's real identity and how she ended up in that role.

Her first input into the investigation occurred on November 6th 1996. That day, she drives with two detectives to Knokke and points out some villas and hotels where she claims to have been present during sex parties in the early 1980s. X2 was not a child victim, as was X1, but rather a spectator invited by an adult. It may not have been quite the same milieu. Only one of the places designated by X2, a villa, also appears in X1's testimony.*1 The environment where she situates the perpetrators is otherwise very reminiscent. Her 'lover', a much older man, had convinced her -sometimes with arguments, sometimes with brute physical force- that this was 'the way it was supposed to be'. She observed some of the top bankers and magistrates in Knokke fornicate to relieve their stress. One of them was O, one of the most influential people in Belgium, who also played a prominent role in X1's story. Judging by how X2 remembers it, these gatherings didn't just

occur in the privacy of well-guarded villas. She recalls one of those parties where just about anyone who knew about it and was willing to pay two thousand francs gained entry. The only condition was that you brought someone along.*2

In the eleven interrogations of X2, a picture emerges of how Belgium was seemingly governed in the 1980s. People in that milieu knew each other. Many of the names she mentioned appear in other witness testimonies. From advocate W, mentioned by Jean-Paul Raemaekers, to one of the leading investigators in the old Van Hees dossier and the discredited Brussels deputy prosecutor Claude Leroy. She also saw Michel Nihoul a few times - even though she considered him one of the more agreeable of all those people. Additionally, she recalls the presence of some judiciary police officers engaged in the Neufchâteau investigation, a few top politicians and a Flemish celebrity.

X2 thinks of herself as one who 'has seen very little'. Only a few times was she an eyewitness to events she found questionable afterwards. For instance, a girl of fifteen or sixteen named Eva was taken 'to the S&M room' during an orgy in a castle but was never seen again afterwards.' X2 had met her several times in those circles. Eva often spoke with her about terrible events which happened in the domain of an aristocratic lady in Brussels.*3 Young children were nearly almost present on such occasions, she says. Nobody knew where they came from, and nobody questioned it either.

The bond between X2 and her interrogators is less emotional than between adjutant De Baets and X1. She developed a good report with chief interrogator Christian Pirard, with his colleague Luc Delmartino somewhat less. 'I don't know, the guy seemed pretty obsessed with me,' she says later. 'I commented about an offender's penis and had already moved on to another subject when he interrupted me: exactly how long was that penis? I showed it with my fingers. He asked if I was sure and took out a ruler. The whole thing looked like a game to him.'*4 As with the other X-witnesses, a psychologist was brought into the fold at the end of March to observe the interrogations. She ended up having to cheer up the psychologist, who became depressed due to the grim nature of her testimony. X2 states she didn't witness everything first-hand but recounts stories she heard from other girls during

the parties. She says she 'only' spent four years in that milieu, from 1984 to 1988. Once, during a gathering of these individuals in a castle in the Belgian Ardennes, she heard strange cries from what sounded like children in the park. 'It was terrible; it was indescribable,' she says.*5 From what she heard and other stories alluded to, she figured this was a hunt for children.

Without the certainty that 'Eva' could have been her real name, the investigators of the antenna-Neufchâteau scour the national archives for children containing this first name who died in the 1980s—long lists of Eva's open up many possibilities but never yielded any new leads.*6 Halfway through May 1997, X2 stops cooperating with the investigation.*7 She no longer wants to be interrogated. The immediate reason is that Michel Clippe's superiors discovered that he and X2 had continued to have private conversations with one another during her testimonies. 'The press wrote afterwards that I was his mistress, that he led my interrogations,' says X2. 'Complete bullshit. He never interrogated me and was never involved in substantiating my statements. He was a long-time friend, and I needed his moral support. I decided to quit when I saw how much trouble he was getting into and how my dossier was evolving. In any case, you could see even then that those people around De Baets were collectively running their heads into a wall. They didn't stand a chance.'

Clippe gets dismissed from the Neufchâteau investigation team. X2 tries to pretend that she was never X2. Primarily based on her testimony, Bourlet declared in early 1997 that the investigation into the Dutroux case could become 'a multi-year task'. No one but her has given the investigators a keener insight into the futility of the mission they have taken on. She knows the police and judicial world inside out. She testifies how the investigation into the Nijvel gang was expertly sabotaged and how the "judicial" perspective evolved further and further away from the truth. 'And that happened again here', X2 reflects. 'The only question lingering in my mind today is how I could have been so naïve back then. I don't care. It was so predictable.'

At the end of 1998, a lady from Brussels in her fifties introduces herself at the office of Justice Minister Tony Van Parys. She is meeting his cabinet chief, Patrick Duinslaeger, who was one of the driving forces behind the X1 investigation two years earlier as a federal magistrate. Duinslaeger doesn't appreciate being reminded of this fact. In the "Law Street" in Brussels, the work of Bourlet and his team is by then only suitable for inviting derision. The French-speaking woman wrote a letter to the minister in December expressing her astonishment at the ease with which -after the closure of the X1 dossier- the consensus was reached that no organised child abuse exists in Belgium. 'How do you expect, in the present climate, other victims to speak up now?' she had written. 'I do not believe it is useful to know specifically who is responsible, but rather how organised crime with children could exist. Therefore, there should be no statute of limitations regarding organised crime which victimises children.'⁸ She was somewhat surprised that she immediately received an invitation for an interview. Her code name became X3.

Five long conversations preceded Sergeant Serge Winkel's first official report on his interviews with her on December 10th, 1996. She is an acquaintance of Marie-Noëlle Bouzet, mother of the disappeared Elisabeth Brichet. Even before the Dutroux case, this woman wanted to draw attention to the reality of semi-familial, semi-commercial child prostitution networks. In interviews and a book, she told the story of her past -anonymously that of her sister, who ended up in psychiatry because of the hell that was her childhood. Memories of their father turning on the bedroom lights at night and the conflict in the two girls' minds. Which was greater: the acute fear or the crushing feeling of guilt that the other would be lifted from her bed that night? The card game under subdued light. The winner was allowed to do whatever he wanted with her, still only a child. Literally. One of the "winners" cut open her lower abdomen - she was eight. Her parents took her to "soirees" in swanky villas. Men came in chauffeur-driven Mercedes. She witnessed the gruesome torture of an eight-year-old; the apotheosis of the evening was the cutting off of his genitals and having these set on his stomach. Even burying the boy was the occasion of some ceremony.

Regina Louf (X1) has been criticised beyond the country's borders for things she never said. Some claimed that X1 described satanic rituals and accused members of the Belgian royal family. In reality, she never made any comments of the sort. X3 did.

No entity has as many unwritten laws as the police force. One of them is that any legal investigation will inevitably end abruptly as soon as it refers, in any way, to a member of the Royal Court. They know this better than anyone in the financial section of the Brussels BOB, where the X-witnesses' interviews were held. This happened before in a fraud case. The constitutional drama Serge Winkel can sense in the air in November 1996 has little to do with proven facts but everything to do with the incalculable risk of the release of public anger that could dwarf the White March protest following the dismissal of Connerotte a few weeks earlier. The most stringent measures have been taken to maintain discretion regarding the side dossiers, but one can never rule out leaks. The facts described by X3 date from the period between 1950 and 1962. They have no direct correlation with Marc Dutroux - who was still in diapers then. However, the testimony was delivered to the public prosecutor of Neufchâteau in dossier 109/96, which also contained statements from X1, X2, and later X4. These are not ordinary times. Never before has the press been so hungry. Public opinion needs little to see through the backroom politics behind the ousting of investigative judge Connerotte. Winkel already sees the headlines: 'Royal Court involved in Dutroux case!'

The lady tells him her life story with remarkable serenity. She is well-known and respected in support groups for victims of sexual abuse.

The French-speaking children's rights Commissioner, Claude Lelièvre, has supported her fight against child prostitution. The political climate was not conducive to dismissing her statements out of hand. In agreement with his superiors, Winkel decides to keep X3 talking as long as possible and to be as frugal as possible when taking notes of her statements. The X1 investigation team would later become the subject of a judicial inquiry accusing them of not having immediately

recorded everything their witness said into a police report. Their colleagues on the third ("X interrogation) team are encouraged to do the opposite. They conducted extensive interviews with X3 on November 7th, 19th and 28th and again on December 4th. Nevertheless, it took them until December 10th 1996, to draw up their first report.*9 This report documents the general outlines of X3's story but omits any statements about the dignitaries she remembers. She was forced into child prostitution from the age of twelve, she says, briefly worked in a bar, and had to recruit other children in her surroundings and 'initiate' them. When she was fifteen, she sustained some bone fractures at the hands of an abuser. Her school was told she fell off her bicycle.

Six months pass before the first official interrogation of X3 takes place. The dossier cites May 26th 1997, as the date, but whether other unrecorded "interrogations" occurred in between is unclear.*10 What is certain is that the official report ends with a rather curious sentence: 'Identical interrogation as 151.829, but now she does not quote individuals connected with the Court.'*11 It appears, therefore, that two versions of the interrogations of X3 exist; one containing dreadful accusations against the Court and another without. In May, when X3's statements were finally added to the 109/96 file, the discrediting of X1's testimonies began under the auspices of police Commander Jean-Luc Duterme. The fear of constitutional dramas had subsided by then, and what commissioner Marc Verwilghen would later call 'the restoration' was already in full swing. During her interrogation, dated May 26th, X3 accuses a former top minister of the SP, the ex-top politician E, also named by X1, as well as a well-known Brussels-based building promoter, a prominent Walloon Socialist Party (PSC) politician and some acquaintances of her parents.

In a section of the dossier dated June 2nd, 1997, X3 tells her whole story. It's a gruesome story. It is about a chateau surrounded by a park where children were locked up in dungeons 'to wait their turn'. In the chateau's tower, she says, there was a kind of exhibition of children's remains in various stages of decomposition. It was the regular group of individuals, about fifty, but she could only identify a few of them. The evening gatherings in this place never ended

without deaths. Notables accompanied by Doberman dogs hunted down naked children released in the park. Children were tied to wood planks and tortured with razor blades and needles. 'I was also made to eat human flesh, fingers of children served in gelatin.'*12

Whoever wants to project this testimony onto the later perception of the X-dossiers in the media is in for a riddle. X3's testimony seems like a parody of everything that has been whispered and suggested in the periphery of the Dutroux case. One would expect that X3 would have been subjected to debunking much earlier than the other Neufchâteau witnesses by the investigators who took the helm after the removal of Adjutant De Baets. It is not a stretch to think that her statements would have been reread many times and that an entire file would have been constructed containing assertions of childhood friends who'd only remember that she 'tended to crack up a bit'. Yet, this did not appear to have happened.

When the X1-storm broke out in the media in January 1998, X3 immediately made herself heard. In a short interview with the newspaper *Le Soir*, she says that she has not noticed any issues in the investigation conducted by the Neufchâteau branch: "Personally, I have no reason to worry. Some sincere detectives still intend to conduct a serious investigation (...). I know only my own story. And I repeat that I have two hundred per cent confidence in the detectives I work with (...). There are those moments when those thoughts shoot through my head: to tell my entire story at a press conference and then, at the end of the testimony, to reveal the names of the people involved. But I don't do it, in the interest of the investigation and the for the good of the children (...). If the intention is to end the children's suffering, if one wants it to stop, then one must be patient."*13

X3 also mentions a detective in an article in the "*Le Soir*" newspaper who called her a few months earlier and tried to convince her that the entire investigation wasn't going anywhere. He asked her if she wanted to discuss the whole affair with him off the record. This detective later turned out to be Michel Clippe. X3 disagrees with his proposal and, on the same day, calls one of the detectives present during her interrogation. It was First Sergeant Dany Lesciauskas, Jean-

Paul Raemaekers' favourite interrogator. Lesciauskas immediately wrote a report against his ex-colleague about an 'attempt at destabilisation.'¹⁴ This wasn't X3's intended outcome. She considered Clippe an investigator 'with a big heart,' but he wanted to pursue things too fast for her liking. 'He tried to get me to reveal things I've never witnessed', she says, 'but I don't think he had any bad intentions'. Lesciauskas' report adds to the series of disciplinary probes against Clippe within the gendarmerie, which will eventually come to nothing.

X3 still visited the antenna-Neufchâteau occasionally in 1998. She is warmly welcomed by commander Jean-Luc Duterme and by some of his companions. They tell her that the investigation is 'still ongoing'. Yes, Langlois has also ordered a rereading of her dossier but expects that will turn out well for her. Of course, she must understand that murders are statute-barred in Belgium after a maximum of twenty years and that none of the facts she identified - however shocking and unacceptable - can still be considered for prosecution. She should also understand that some of the people she mentions enjoy immunity from prosecution guaranteed by the Constitution. The Brussels BOB reminded X3 that they had interviewed the other X witnesses but said their testimonies 'could not be objectified'. Until the beginning of 1999, X3 still believed that her testimony was being actively pursued. It is unclear whether X3 is aware of her statements' effect on the investigation in the periphery of the Dutroux case.

Is X3 being duped? One would think so. When, in the summer of 1997, the Verwilghen Commission began the second part of its search -for protection this time- counsellor Etienne Marique of the Brussels Court of Appeal was brought in. Marc Verwilghen has heard a rumour of tensions at the antenna-Neufchâteau. Marique is assigned to interrogate some members of this antenna. First Sergeant Jean-Luc Decker, Commander Duterme's right-hand man, is one of the first investigators to be interviewed. The interrogation took place on August 17th, 1997. A few weeks later, Decker informs his bosses in a slightly panicked-sounding note - under the heading 'confidential' - of what was said during the interview with Marique. Decker is surprised that the counsellor knows so much. He knows the broad outlines of the X testimonies,

has a reasonably clear idea of which detectives are working on which dossiers, and is aware of the anxieties within the investigative cell. This passage from his note, sent to Major Guissard in Neufchâteau and countersigned by Duterme, gives an idea of what was going on behind the scenes during that period: 'Concerning the statement of X3, which discredits the royal family, it should be noted that this statement is not documented in the legal proceedings to date (decision of Mr Langlois). I took the opportunity to make it clear to counsellor Marique that no detective of the antenna-Neufchâteau conducted investigations against individuals who enjoy immunity from prosecution or a privilege of jurisdiction. In the same order of thought, I specified that no magistrate had issued even the slightest investigative order concerning these persons.'*15

What conclusions can one draw from this? Langlois ruled that no testimony should be given against members of the Court or any other untouchables. In this context, it is unclear what the BOB's purpose was for interviewing X3 so many times. Another question arises: why do the investigators rail against the other X-witnesses, while X3 is welcomed like a princess each visit and even gets summoned to the Justice Cabinet later? It takes little imagination to arrive at a more or less coherent hypothesis. Without realising it, X3 blew the 109/96 dossier wide open. It was no longer about her credibility or that of the other witnesses; it was no longer about unsolved murders or the antecedents of Dutroux and Nihoul. It was about politics. X3 seemed to have created a stalemate. To bestow credibility on even a fraction of the 109/96 dossier - for example, by solving an old murder - would have created a kind of constitutional ticking bomb. Rather than run that risk, it was decided in mid-1997 that the investigations had to be sabotaged,

'one way or another,' says one investigator. You must try to put yourself in the shoes of the magistrates. For them, an official report is, first and foremost, a legal document to consider with reverence. If something like X3's testimony is recorded in an official police report, it can destroy a magistrate's career. The slightest positive development in the X dossiers increased the risk that X3's statements would make it into the press even if

the various testimonies were unrelated. In such a situation, the "protection of the State" comes first.

'Be nice to me because I am conditioned to kill', X4 warns us when we first meet her in the Brussels-South train station snack bar on a frosty day in 1998. She is rather smiley, tall in stature, in her early thirties, with a twinkle in her eyes. It is not entirely incomprehensible that at some point, the X1 critics within the antenna-Neufchâteau began to wonder if X4 could be cut from the same kind of cloth as X1. She has the same morbid habit of telling the most shocking thing with the broadest possible grin. However, there is one slight difference: X4 does not always make it clear which of her statements were meant as a joke and which ones were not. She will go down in history as the X-witness who mentioned Pope John Paul II in the Neufchâteau file. So this statement did go straight "into the (legal) proceedings", in contrast to X3's remarks about the Court. 'But that was a joke,' exclaimed X4. 'Come on, do I really have to explain that now'? That came at the end of a very gruelling interrogation in early 1997. Those two BOB officers sat in their squad car, staring into the distance. They looked so depressed. So I thought: time for some humour.'

Not everyone is happy with X4. The investigators did not know what hit them when they found their super-secret witness mentioned with name and surname in a popular Flemish weekly in early 1997. The article was about cults. As a former cult member, X4 disclosed that leading members of certain political parties also allowed themselves to become voluntary members. X4 bounced between faiths from when she was sixteen. First with the Christian community, then with the Salvation Army and finally with the Pentecostal congregation. The investigators eager to declare her testimony worthless did not have to wait long for an excuse in mid-1998. A few scripts about Good, Evil and Satan circulating within groups frequented by her are more than enough to convince Langlois.

Otherwise, eliminating her testimony from the investigation rests mainly on findings that initially made her story seem plausible. 'It was essentially the same story as X1,' says one investigator. With X4, however, we had a problem from the start. Whenever she answered a question, she immediately asked: is it possible? "You shouldn't ask us that," replied

Adjutant Marc Mertens. "You are the witness." That wasn't a bad system. During the interrogations, Mertens was the bad cop, and his colleague the good one. But there was an issue each time they asked her if she was sure the perpetrator was the man whose name she had mentioned. She started giggling, never wanting to be sure. Once, she said verbatim, "I'm eighty-five per cent sure."

The first contact between X4 and the antenna Neufchâteau occurred on November 20th 1996. It came about through a woman from Ghent, Corry, who was in a legal battle with her ex-husband because he had sexually abused her little daughter. The woman advises X4 to go to the Brussels police station, where she believes that thanks to the Dutroux case, they are finally serious about "listening to victims". In Brussels, X4 is received by Sergeant Mertens and First Sergeant Peter De Waele. De Waele acted for weeks as a cameraman during the X1 interrogations, and Mertens is at that time after De Baets, the "number two" of the investigation team.

A first series of interrogations yields a story that quietly sounds familiar. She reveals how her mother handed her over to Jacques V, a man in his late fifties. He directed SM movies with children, including X4. Interrogation after interrogation, boundaries of horror are stretched. Extreme torment, rape scenes, murders of babies under the gaze of men with black hoods. Pretty soon in the investigation, the names of the politicians O and E are mentioned as 'regular clients'. X1 and X3 have by now likewise identified these two individuals as child murderers. X4 also mentions the prince who was prominent in Nathalie W's story. In January, she singled out a hotel in Knokke X1 also identified. In the same period, she points at photos of childhood friends of X1 who confirmed parts of her testimony. Without apparently knowing who she is talking about, X4 also describes a high government official whose name once appeared in the Pinon dossier, foreshadowing later investigations into the Pink Ballets affair. It could mean three things. X1 and X4 either dealt with the same perpetrators or the same kind of facilitators. Or, more simply, one of the investigators ran his mouth in her presence about the state of the other files.

After the first series of interrogations, lasting from December 1996 to February '97, Adjutant Mertens announced he no longer wanted to be involved in this investigation. X4 does not offer anything tangible, he argues. It is unfortunate for X4, but in this case, we'd better stop, he tells her at the end of that first series of interrogations. Mertens sees himself as De Baets' corrective factor. Together, they formed a perfect tandem for years. 'In those days, Mertens said that it would already be a great success if we could solve the murders of Dellaert and Van Hees,' a colleague remembers. He was livid when he heard that Peter De Waele had started a second series of interrogations of X4.

In this second series, De Waele takes a more critical stance. When X4 tells how respectable people from Opus Dei belonged to the most sadistic clientele during an interrogation in July, he suddenly returns to that story about the pope. Can she elaborate on that? X4 continues to emphasise that it was a joke. However, her interrogators seem to have been forced by their superiors to revisit her comment.

This is the bizarre thing about the X-saga. After the summer of 1997, X1 is summoned to occasional interviews by the BOB, but this inevitably leads to quarrels with her new interrogators, Eddy Verhaeghen and Danny De Pauw. During conversations off the record -of which they afterwards draw up rigorous reports- they try to get her to admit that she perhaps "enjoyed" it after all. After the detectives contacted her therapist, Bie Heyse, about how they could best approach X1 so that she would feel at ease, they did precisely the opposite of what she advised them. Nathalie W and X2 have dropped out. The only witness examination where at least a semblance of continuity is retained is that of X4. In early 1998, there was even talk of helicopter flights to locate the places she described. Investigators, however, speak of X4 cynically as 'the most comical of the whole group'. Yet there is little doubt that the young lady from West Flanders must have experienced terrific horrors in her childhood. At sixteen, she ran away from home. She ended up in a shelter in Wingene. A report from that time mentions severe psychological problems, social isolation and 'beatings and real bullying, towards the sadistic, at the hand of her parents'. It was not X4 who took her report

to the investigators. They went to look it up themselves, possibly intending to show that this was yet another case where no one had noticed anything during her childhood. During her first interrogation, X4 accused Noël V, a close acquaintance of Jacques V. The detectives discovered that this man had already been convicted of sex offences with children in 1983 and 1990. One of the victims identified was X4's sister.

As with the other witnesses, the investigators looked at pictures of X4 as a youth and compared them with child porno pics seized during earlier legal actions. A blurry photo of the still very young X4 turns up in Raemaekers' collection. 'They showed me that picture,' she says. 'I shuddered. That gave me a shock. I said that I couldn't say for sure whether it was me or not. Afterwards, I did tell them all kinds of things about Raemaekers, but yes... In the meantime, I know how things work at the BOB. They reasoned that she must have read about it somewhere. The BOB told at the time that they would examine that picture scientifically. I haven't heard anything more about it.'¹⁶ Enquiries reveal that there is doubt whether the girl in the picture is X4. And the justice department can't do anything with doubts.

X4 wrote a letter to the Verwilghen Commission in early 1998. She expressed her surprise at the request of the investigators in mid-1997 to give up her anonymity. She questioned the course of the investigation, which gave her the feeling of having been used as a kind of plaything. She did not like being made to sit in the car for hours with anonymous individuals. Sometimes, the mandated female psychologist was there, sometimes not. She was still guessing what the BOB would do with the information she had provided. 'Feedback about the investigation is a means to achieve quality improvement, which was the only intention of this letter', she concluded.¹⁷

What the Brussels police intended to do with her testimony became clear afterwards. X4 must lend her cooperation in discrediting the X1 files. On November 17th, her friend Corry is interrogated.¹⁸ Corry brought X4 into contact with Neufchâteau. BOB Eddy Verhaeghen and Willy Vandeput, enthusiastic forces behind the 'rereading' of the X1-file, bombard Corry for hours with questions about who knows who

within the circles of the Ghent women's movement and social work. The two BOB officers have discovered something: Corry knows Tania V, the woman who called Connerotte on behalf of X1. In the report drawn up after the interrogation, the detectives use language that strongly suggests that it concerns the fight against the mafia. Block letters and exclamation marks indicate who knows whom and who might know whom. The interrogation of Corry yielded little more than that she 'confesses' that she has known Tania V for years and adds that she does not immediately see what could be wrong with that. Women with problems because of violent men worldwide face two choices: burying themselves in self-reproach or seeking help from people who offer support. Corry and Tania chose the second option. They met at the non-profit organisation THW: Tegen Haar Wil (Against Her Wish). Regina Louf once worked there as a volunteer -for the same reason- but Corry has no idea who Verhaeghen and Vandeput are talking about when they want her to 'confess' that she also knows X1 well.

Now, the hypothesis of the two BOB officers need not be so foolish or irrelevant. It could be that THW was a kind of self-help group where abused women, during talking sessions, urged each other, under the expert guidance of some therapists or not, into ever more gruesome descriptions of their own experiences. Only: THW was not a self-help group. It was an organisation that tried to provide legal assistance to victims of sexual violence, wanted to refer them meaningfully, and worked with the government with proposals for a more humane reception. THW no longer exists today partly because the Flemish government poached the driving forces out of it for positions within its administration. THW never organised any talking sessions.

That, in a nutshell, is what Corry is trying to make clear to the BOB. She has to repeat that she does not know X1 and that X1 and X4 certainly do not know each other since X4 has been trying for some time now to find out more about that other witness from Ghent Neufchâteau - and does not know where to start. In early 1998, she even called journalists, hoping to get the phone number of the then-still-anonymous X1. In an official report drawn up for examining magistrate Van Espen within the framework of the file on the murder of Christine Van Hees, Verhaeghen and Vandeput nevertheless change their stance:

`Multiple elements in the investigation confirm that there is a link between these persons.'*19

It is remarkable how investigators interrogate someone and report to the magistrate precisely the opposite of what the interrogation revealed. What these mysterious 'elements' profess to show that X1 and X4 knew each other would never become clear. Verhaeghen and Vandepuut's final report is one of the official documents on which Minister Stefaan De Clerck will later base his statement that, contrary to what certain media report, the investigation into the murder of the Brussels girl 'has not stopped'.

- And you can guarantee me that everything will remain anonymous?
- We can make you an X.
- A what?
- An X. Anonymous witnesses in this dossier receive a number. X1, X2, X3...
- That's nice. And what number would I get?
- Well, let's see. I don't have my papers here. Say a number between ten and one hundred.
- Can I choose?
- Yes, you can.
- Really?
- Yes.
- Then I choose sixty-nine.

We can permit ourselves an occasional laugh, the two Brussels police officers thought, when they drew up a report that Sunday afternoon, November 17th 1996, with the heading 'Nous entendons X69, qui nous déclare...'. At the witness's request, the interrogation does not occur in the gendarmerie building but in the studio of the French-language TV channel RTL-TVi. The man who likes to identify himself with his sexual activities is a French-speaking prostitute. 'Normally you don't talk in this profession', he emphasises. Now, he wants to make an exception. 'You should know that for my profession, I regularly attend sex parties.' He says what he experienced a few years ago on one of those occasions was at least as traumatic for him as the discovery of the girls' bodies at Dutroux.

The witness had already told his story a few hours earlier, wearing a mask to hide his face on the Sunday talk show "Controversy". Now, he sits uncomfortably, shifting back and forth in front of BOB officers Bille and Pirard. X69 works as a transvestite in the more extreme sector. Sadomasochism and scatology are his specialty. The man does not miss an opportunity to allude to his debauched life with tights and wig. The BOBs are getting impatient. One wrong word, they know, and the witness steps out. They experienced this a few weeks earlier at their first meeting. At that time, he demanded that the BOB officers sign a contract guaranteeing he would still be alive in three weeks. That was an impossible demand, the BOB officers had explained to him. "Well, then I won't say anything," the witness had replied.

Three weeks later, still alive and kicking, and to their surprise, the officers see him on television. Despite the distorted voice in the dark environment, they recognise him immediately. The man is not soft on the gendarmerie. 'They don't want to investigate anything,' the voice says. When I wanted to testify, I was treated as a fantasist! The officers didn't even wait for the broadcast to finish to contact Bourlet, who asked them to give the witness one more try.*20 The story begins on a Friday in 1993 or 1994 when X69 is working in the red-light district of Antwerp and receives an offer from a pimp friend to earn 50,000 francs in one evening. It seems like a routine job. X69 must participate in a sex party as an 'attraction'. The venue is a villa in Berendrecht, a rural village on the road between Antwerp and the Netherlands. When X69 arrives that evening dressed as a woman, large American cars are parked in front of the house. A grey Mercedes with a Consular Corps (CC) license plate also exists. A woman leads him into the living room, where he finds four men and three women. Despite the orange muted light, the place does not feel very welcoming. X69 has the impression that the building has been empty for some time and that the furniture -three canapés, a coffee table and a mirror- have been put there for the occasion. 'That struck me because the ambience there was not at all like I was used to at other sex parties. It was more intimate. Usually, there are always a lot more people.'*21 One of the sofas is occupied by four children, three girls and a boy. X69 estimates them to be between eight and thirteen years old. 'I don't think they came from Belgium, but from Germany

or the Netherlands. They might have been sold or loaned by their parents.*22

The women were prostitutes, X69 assumed, who said he didn't know anyone present. Two faces he did recognise so many years later: 'They were Michel Nihoul and Annie Bouty'. What follows is a description of how the evening evolves from a 'warming up party where the participants get acquainted while passing around valium pills and alcohol to more serious work. Couples begin to make love to each other and, after midnight, retire one by one to rooms on the first floor. Some take a child with them. X69 noticed that Nihoul was particularly interested in the three girls. 'He sought to approach them by whispering to them kindly: are you shy? Come.'*23 The children are also solicited by other couples. 'But I didn't touch them,' X69 stresses. He deals with a fifty-year-old who has opted for a "sado-uro" experience, which amounts to wanting urine in the mouth.

X69 feels uneasy. Nihoul, dressed in an ordinary three-piece suit at the beginning of the evening, appears later in the evening with a bed sheet wrapped around his body, draped like a toga. "I could establish that Nihoul effectively raped one of the two girls. (...) Another couple began to grope the second girl. They asked me to join them. I replied that they asked for me in the room next door. I walked out of the room and heard the two girls shouting."*24 Annie Bouty does not touch the children, X69 says. She has sex with a thirty-something while the boy and one of the girls are ordered to watch. X69 freshens up in the bathroom and wonders about his purpose at this unusual party. Nothing, he decides. 'I went back to the first room to see the faces of the two men, to be one hundred per cent sure that the day I would get into trouble, I would be able to recognise them.' X69 leaves the house along with his partner from that evening. 'I never saw my fifty thousand francs.'

On the surface, something doesn't seem right about X69's story.

The same evening, the BOB officers drive with him to Berendrecht. X69 cannot find the villa anywhere. The villa remains untraceable even when the investigators return with him during the day. Without hesitation, X69 points out another

house. 'That's where Micha lived,' he points out. Micha is the pimp who helped him get the lousy job. 'Micha was living with Petra, a prostitute, at the time. The villa of the sex party was in the same street.' The information about the second house turns out to be correct. A Petra does indeed live at this address, who until a few years ago lived together with her pimp Micha. But Micha has moved away in the meantime. It brings the investigators no closer to the villa in question.

The presence of Nihoul and Bouty intrigues the investigators. They propose a confrontation to determine if X69 is not just making his story up. The transvestite agrees - with the necessary ado. 'You'll have to pick me up at home. They may not recognise me since I was dressed as a woman.' Something strange happens when X69 is shown a series of photographs of Nihoul, whom he is supposed to point out. The transvestite designates photo 5 in the album. The man in photo 5 is not Michel Nihoul, but LV, the main suspect in the 136/96 case, another side-dossier to the Dutroux case. In chapter 5.4, we will discuss that dossier in more detail. LV has a close resemblance to Nihoul. It could well be that the many testimonies against Nihoul regarding rapes and attempted child abductions actually related to LV. However, the investigators in the X69 case seem to have little interest in considering this perspective at the end of 1996. In their official report, they dryly state: 'This photograph, however, is that of a man whose identity is known to us, who is involved in another dossier examined by investigating judge Langlois, and of whom we can say that he bears a physical resemblance to Nihoul.'²⁵ Nothing more.

Only three weeks later, during a new reconnoitring trip, X69 recognises a building that strongly reminds him of the villa he has been in. The location and surroundings match his description, but there are striking differences in the house itself. The colour of the walls is not correct, and there seems to be a different roof. 'It's so strange,' says the transvestite. He doesn't remember the front door and those windows at all. And where did that canopy for the cars go? 'Now yes,' X69 adds, 'it's been a while, and I had quite a few amarettos by the time I got there.' The detectives can't believe their ears: 'Yes, and what else?' Reluctantly, X69 admits that he was also on valium

pills that night. 'I'm convinced they spiked my drink because I normally don't get drunk that quickly.'

While some BOBs attribute a high "Raemaekers rating" to the transvestite, others are left wondering what benefit the man might get from his honesty. His testimony is not without risk. Unlike the other Xs, he is not a victim but someone from what could be called the 'perpetrator group'. That may explain why he constantly beats around the bush like a paranoid lunatic. His natural distrust of 'the gendarmerie' seems overshadowed by an even greater fear of 'the milieu'.

A few days after the first interrogation, X69 calls Pascal Vrebos of RTL-TV in a state of panic. He goes into hiding at a friend's house; the presenter can tell from the transvestite's rambling speech. X69 says he is 'wanted'. Another few days later, X69 calls the BOB. His testimony on television is causing him nothing but misery, he complains. Now, he is being extorted. 25,000 German Marks (500,000 Bf) X69 claims he has had to pay off. Fortunately, friends have lent him the sum.*26

Did X69 put this entire story together in the vague hope of making the gendarmerie half a million lighter? The BOB officers begin to have more and more doubts. In early December, on the other hand, they establish that certain things in his story are true after all. The description of the villa in Berendrecht corresponds in every detail with what the current owner can say. The house stood empty for two years and was then thoroughly renovated. The doors and windows were replaced, a new roof was laid, and the exterior walls were raised. The shelter for the cars was removed.*27 X69 could not tell the detectives much about the villa's interior. He did sketch the division of the rooms, where the stairs ran, where the bathroom was, and where the kitchen was. There, too, are essential points of similarity the detectives note during a search.*28

The villa's owner had seen tenants come and go for twenty years. Rarely did he care about them, as long they paid the rent. The last tenants left a somewhat more profound impression on him. They left a mess behind when they moved out at the end of 1993. 'They had allowed the place to deteriorate completely,' the owner tells BOB. Neighbours also

complained about the couple because they threw many nighttime parties and kept nearby residents awake. When the BOB inquired in the neighbourhood, they kept getting the same stories about the former residents. 'There was a lot of drinking, and there was always noise. Those people had visitors almost every night. Their driveway was always full of cars.' The current residents of the villa, who have only lived there since 1994, also know about it. 'They seemed to be quite sexually active people. It is said that they walked around naked in the garden.'

After the neighbourhood investigation in Berendrecht, which nevertheless produced new intriguing data, the police dossier dies a quiet death. X69 is partly to blame for this. Communication with the investigators becomes increasingly challenging. At the Neufchâteau branch, other cases are taking up all the attention. Hardly anyone finds time for this demanding witness. Investigation teams pass X69 to each other like a hot potato. On January 8th 1997, a heated argument erupted between X69 and the BOB officers Patrick Noller and Baudouin Dernicourt. They had just finished an investigation into Dutroux's financial assets and were questioning the procession of X-witnesses that Bourlet seemed to be expecting so much from. 'X69 no longer wants to be contacted, except through his lawyer whose name he refuses to give', we read in the official report about this last contact with X69.*29 The dispute was about the mysterious member of the Diplomatic Corps, about whom X69 says he is not only a good father but also his best customer. 'Why do you want him? He didn't abuse any children! No one can reconstruct exactly how the discussion went, but it appeared that X69 was utterly offended by a statement from one of the BOB officers saying something like: 'If you don't point him out, we will find him ourselves.'

A breakup with a witness is always undesirable for an investigation, but it doesn't usually mean the end of the case. In the case of the dossier with code name X69, it is different. Numerous hypotheses remain. X69 visited that villa once and made up all the rest. He hoped to get information in exchange for what he gave. He was after money. 'CC' played a much more active role than X69 wanted to make it appear and was pressured by him to stop cooperating... The final act of investigation is requesting a rogatory commission to

Dortmund, Germany, where Micha has since been located. After that, the file with the laughable name disappears into a drawer.

On the evening of February 20th, 1997, some armed agents of the Special Intervention Squadron (SIE) of the gendarmerie holed up in Rue du Berger in the Brussels municipality of Forest. The target of their secret operation is a certain 'Olivier', a man suspected of doing the dirty work for Philippe C. There is talk of a transaction of footage of sex parties showing politicians, magistrates and other dignitaries. Neufchâteau has been fruitlessly searching for such material for six months and thinks Philippe C. is the right target. The man from Brussels was sentenced to three years in prison in 1986 for an affair that initially generated much press coverage.*30 There was talk of sex and cocaine parties on the second floor of the famous Mirano club in Sint-Joost-ten-Node, where the wealthy young Brussels folks partied. The press talked about the case of the *cocaine fashion*. It erupted after the death by overdose of the son-in-law of a Brussels magistrate on April 14th, 1985. The thirteen defendants, including Philippe C., were tried only for drug trafficking. Anyone familiar with the case knows that a significant vice crime section was linked to the investigation, which never reached the court. There was talk of very compromising film footage taken of their customers. Nothing was ever proven. 'From a reading of the dossier, it appears that the vice crimes mentioned therein were hardly ever substantiated during the investigation, although there were more than enough reasons to do so', the commission Verwilghen states later in its second final report.*31

Yves Zimmer headed the vice section of the Brussels Judiciary Police from 1982 to 1987. In 1984, based on an informant's statement, he began an investigation into sex parties in Brussels.*32 The main ingredients were classic. On weekends, they took place at night in swanky villas and were attended by high-ranking figures from the political, judicial and financial worlds. Zimmer developed a strategy whereby a couple "on assignment" had to infiltrate this environment to catch perpetrators in the act of committing offences involving minors. Between April 27th, 1985, and January 8th, 1986, a

dozen ultra-secret operations were conducted in and around the outskirts of Brussels and the infamous castle of Faulx-les-Tombes. Agents equipped with walkie-talkies lay in the bushes, stalking out each of the locations, ready to intervene. Halfway through 1985, the hope for success was highest after the Brussels BOB had come across statements in another investigation about blackmail with video cassettes. At the magistrates' request, it was decided that the two police services would work together.*33 Eleven times, this combined force pulled out with all its might but failed to catch a single glimpse of children.*34

Yves Zimmer later came into disrepute in the Reyniers case, was also convicted and suspended, but later rehabilitated. He ended up as a commissioner at the Judiciary Police of Arlon. His team was on duty when Laetitia Delhez's disappearance was reported. Thus, Zimmer became responsible for the Judiciary Police's input into the investigation at Neufchâteau. There is one side file that Zimmer took a personal interest in early in 1997: VM1. That is the code of the most anonymous of all the anonymous Neufchâteau witnesses. VM1 is not a pathetic girl fighting a traumatised memory in the interrogation room, a neurotic or an MPS patient; it is also not a transvestite. VM stands for Victime Moeurs. His profession: gangster.

VM1 is a well-known figure in the Brussels underworld. He has several armed robberies on his record. Because of his experience, only one policeman knows the secret VM1 has been carrying for almost fifteen years. It is Yves Zimmer. He does not know VM1 personally but has stumbled upon his name in the distant past. As far as Zimmer could tell, VM1 acted involuntarily as a sex worker a quarter of a century ago. Later in life, he began to play an active, 'logistical' role in a network of child prostitution. Zimmer never stopped hoping for an opportunity to get VM1 to talk someday. At the end of 1996, Zimmer went to find out what had become of VM1. He was amazed to discover that the man had become an informer for the gendarmerie many years later. Zimmer goes in search of the runner and encounters an active Tintin type. The young gendarme is called Marc Toussaint and is a sergeant with the brigade in Uccle.

In the first half of 1998, Toussaint made it into the national press several times. The first time he resigned as a gendarme and accused his superiors in interviews of protecting pimps and gangsters. The second time, the Brussels investigating judge Jacques Pignolet searched his house and found documents from the Neufchâteau investigation. On a third occasion, shortly after Dutroux's escape, Toussaint emerges as an authentic activist. He put a tent in front of gendarmerie boss Willy De Ridder to ask for his resignation. Later, it turned out that Toussaint and, among others, the Brussels psychiatrist André Pinon - the instigator of the first investigation into the Pink Ballets - had gone on his own to conduct excavation works at an older man's place in Schaarbeek. The latter claimed that Patrick Derochette had littered this man's garden with corpses and that the Brussels court refused to come and dig them up.*35 'I know that many people question my tactics during that period,' Marc Toussaint now says. 'I wanted to provoke because I witnessed the sabotage of an investigation first hand. Nobody needed to know that for months, I worked directly under the authority of Bourlet and Zimmer to provide them with evidence. I worked in secret, after hours, without my superiors at the gendarmerie of Uccle being allowed to know anything. At that time in Neufchâteau, they had already figured this was the only way to bring such a case to a successful conclusion. They feared obstruction, as was evident in the X-files at the time. It went so far that they secretly let me use the Mercedes of Adjutant Legendre during the weekend.'*36

On February 16th, 1997, four adults sit together sobbing in Commissioner Zimmer's office. Around the table are Yves Zimmer himself, Michel Bourlet, Marc Toussaint and VM1. That day, the fifth interrogation takes place. The gangster bared his soul and told how, as a child of nine, he came from a broken family to a home in Mont-Saint-Guibert and was picked up there at regular intervals by a juvenile judge to be delivered to spacious villas in the vicinity of Brussels. 'For four years, until he was thirteen, most of little VM1's weekends were devoted to sexual abuse,' Toussaint says. 'He saw murders of children happen, learned how initially initiated but ultimately unwilling 'guests' were killed in strange road

accidents. He later ended up in a home in Brasschaat, and there, too, the juvenile court judge came to pick him up.'

VM1 also talks incessantly about his years at the Mirano. 'I had to pick up children and then get them drunk or give them drugs, and then take them to the private area, where they were abused.' If, at first sight, VM1's life story seems to be very far removed from the Dutroux case, the connection with the X-files is quickly made. The Mirano was one of the prime meeting places for many of the prominent people the X-witness mentioned. Some arms dealers and other underworld figures also appear in that same milieu. It is a dangerous mix of criminality and high society.

The Mirano trial in 1986 revealed that the main suspect, Philippe C., had young boys picked up at the Brussels Fontainasplein. At the time, there was talk of large quantities of images C had made of his "clients". However, the Brussels prosecutor's office remained blind to anything not directly related to cocaine abuse. Judge Claire De Gryse said without blushing during the hearing that she had not even looked at the seized material 'because everyone assured me that nothing in it could shock even a capuchin monk'.*37 Curious. During that same trial, prosecutor Talon stated that Philippe C. had confessed in the investigation that during the cocaine parties at the Mirano, children provided a 'special attraction'*38

Philippe C. wasn't a lightweight. Together with kingpins from the real estate sector and the close circle of acquaintances of former prime minister Paul Vanden Boeynants; he founded the public limited company Parc Savoy in 1985. The company, which set itself the task of running bars and restaurants and organising 'cultural and social gatherings', was affiliated with the highly influential Cercle des Nations. This private club has 81 founding members, including numerous noblemen, businessmen, bankers, diplomats, and politicians, with specific names quoted by the X-witnesses.

One of the thirteen convicted individuals in the Mirano trial was Alexis Alewaeters. He was sentenced to five years in prison.*39 Alewaeters is an old acquaintance of Michel Nihoul,

who lent him a Porsche in 1993 - and never saw it again.*40 When the still-young Alewaeters had his first problems with the courts in 1980, Annie Bouty rushed to his aid.*41 Through her company Cadreco, she tried to speed up his parole and provided him with a lawyer: Didier de Quévy. Alexis Alewaeters is also a part-time manager of Casper Flier's petrol station in Anthée, who later helped Michel Lelièvre find a job there.

On the evening of February 18th, 1997, Toussaint receives a phone call from VM1. He says he has been stopped in the street by two unknown men, who seem to know he has gone to Neufchâteau with his story. They demanded that he 'transmit the photos' to them immediately. 'Before the Neufchâteau investigation, he had never spoken to me about photos, footage or anything else,' says Toussaint. 'I didn't know anything about his past. Now VM1 was completely over his head. I didn't know what to think of it either, and I still don't know now. What I do know for sure is that he knew Philippe C. well and worked for him for years.' That evening, Toussaint calls Neufchâteau, where he gets Major Guissard on the line. He advises Toussaint to draw up an official report on his witness, who has been super-secret up until then. The young gendarme follows the order. 'The rest of the story is anyone's guess,' he continues. 'My report ended up with Major Decraene of the CBO, who oversaw the case then. You can imagine the frenzy at the gendarmerie: one of their people had gone behind the back of the hierarchy to work with Bourlet and Zimmer. Everything they did and said aimed to debunk the whole affair as much as possible.'

VM1, it says, was given 48 hours by the two men on the street to get them what they wanted. They gave him a phone number on a piece of paper. He must call back two days later and follow the instructions obtained there to transfer 'the material' - if not, he will be dead by the end of the week. Based on this information, the SIE goes into action on the evening of February 20th. In the meantime, members of the 1KOS of the Brussels BOB had taken over the investigation. The gendarmes took up the post in front of the address corresponding to the telephone number in the Rue du Berger in Forest. The line is

tapped. The intention is that VM1 will call and that, depending on the reaction obtained, the SIE will follow the man or arrest him immediately. 'VM1 looked terrified,' recalls Toussaint. 'The policemen around him were making jokes. Someone said this is probably another fake address of the State Security. You don't think about it at the time. But it is bizarre. When I inquired again a few days later about that telephone number, it turned out that the line had been disconnected: "The dialled number is not recognised." It gets even stranger when the detectives see the mysterious Olivier enter the house, and VM1 receives the signal to call.

- 'I will call you, as agreed. I brought the package you asked me for.'
- 'I don't know you. I don't know who you are. You don't know me either. I don't know anything about a package. Describe me; describe what I look like.'*42

'It was strange,' says Marc Toussaint. 'That guy held a five-minute monologue on the phone as if he had been warned. When you get someone on the phone who accidentally dialled the wrong number, you don't respond that way, right? It seemed like some set-up to dismiss VM 1 as a "phoney". The people at 1KOS were excited; they loved how things turned out.'

Toussaint continued to lobby for several weeks with his testimony but got in trouble with his hierarchy. VM1 understood the lesson, Toussaint thinks. 'He didn't want to hear anything more from the investigation and from me less and less. I spoke to him a few more times about the so-called image material. That is safely hidden, he said. It was the first and the last time he wanted to discuss his past with the Justice Department.'*43

After the VM1 Episode, no noteworthy attempt was made to discover more about the possible links between Bouty and Nihoul and the group around Philippe C.

NOTES:

1. Findings of the BOB Brussels, November 6th, 1996, PV 116.799.
2. Interrogations X2, Brussels BOB, November 19th and December 3rd, 1996, PV's 117.535 and 117.437.
3. Interrogation X2, Brussels BOB, April 24th, 1997, PV 151.419.
4. Interview with X2, February 1998.
5. Interrogation X2, Brussels BOB, March 27, 1997, PV 151.044.
6. Findings Brussels BOB, May 16, 1997, PV 152,186.
7. Brussels BOB, May 15 1997, PV 151.521.
8. Gazet van Antwerpen, December 11, 1998.
9. Contact report with X3, Brussels BOB, December 10th, 1996, PV 118,069.
10. According to some of their colleagues, X3's interrogators saw her more than twenty times in total.
11. Interrogation X3, Brussels BOB, May 26th 1997, PV 151.688.
12. Interrogation X3, Brussels BOB, June 2nd, 1997, PV 151.829.
13. 'An X: no threat of obstruction.' Le Soir, January 7th, 1998.
14. Brussels BOB, September 1st 1997, PV 152.330.
15. Note from Jean-Luc Decker to Major Guissard, directed by Commander Duterme, September 23rd, 1997, no. 250/Ant.
16. Conversation with X4, June 29th, 1998.
17. Letter X4 to the Verwilghen Commission, Ghent, February 14th, 1998.
18. Corry is, at the request of the person involved, a pseudonym.
19. Interrogation Corry, BOB Brussels, November 17, 1997, PV 152.590
20. Interrogation X69, November 17, 1996, Brussels BOB, PV 116.917.
21. Interrogation X69, December 10, 1996, Brussels BOB, PV 118.176.
22. Interrogation X69, November 19, 1996, Brussels BOB, PV 117.319.
23. Interrogation X69, November 17, 1996, Brussels BOB, PV 116.917.

24. Interrogation X69, November 19, 1996, Brussels BOB, PV 117.319.
25. Interrogation X69, December 10, 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 118.176.
26. Assessment attitude X69, November 22, 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 117.321 and December 1st, 1996, PV 117.719.
27. Interrogation owner villa in Berendrecht, December 2nd, 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 118.876.
28. House search of villa Berendrecht, December 20th, 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 118.874.
29. Contact with X69, January 8th, 1997, BOB Brussels, PV 150.013.
30. Correctional court Brussels, March 24, 1986. Philippe C. received three years' probation. The Brussels Court of Appeal converted this sentence into an effective prison sentence on October 8, 1986.
31. The second final report is from commission-Verwilghen, section 4, 'The relationship network around Nihoul', passage 3.1.1.5.
32. The informative investigation was under the authority of the Brussels substitutes Peytier and Vandoren. The file carried the number 38.11.562/84. Vandoren later became a national magistrate in 1988.
33. It concerned the Feluy case.
34. Note from Yves Zimmer to prosecutor Michel Bourlet, Neufchâteau June 13th 1997.
35. The bones that Toussaint extracted from it were of animal origin.
36. Interview with Marc Toussaint, December 5th, 1998.
37. Le Soir, February 25th, 1986.
38. Het Laatste Nieuws, February 25, 1986, and Het Volk, February 26, 1986. This passage also draws on the book "De Namen uit de Doofpot", Stef Janssens, Epo, 1998.
39. The Court of Appeal later confirmed this sentence. Telex press agency Belga, October 8, 1986.
40. Rumours and facts, Michel Nihoul, Dark & Light Publication, 1998.
41. Interview of Alexis Alewaeters, Brussels police force, May 7, 1997, PV 151.431.

42. The course of the telephone conversation, according to Marc Toussaint.
43. Interview with Marc Toussaint, December 1998.

3. 'During these interrogations, I constantly tend to cry, but I don't know why.'

Witness X7, childhood friend of X1, February 1st 1997.

It was one of the many things Odette never entirely understood. The sentence 'Say, I have to visit Madame Poupaert' could pass his lips at any time of day or night. When she asked him what he was doing there, his answer varied from 'going for a coffee' to 'business'. Once, he returned with a massive gash on his face. A dog had bitten him, he said. Madame Poupaert was nearly fifty and corresponded not at all to the type of woman Tony V fancied. Odette knew she was a well-groomed lady with one young daughter and a husband who kept out of the way. She didn't get it at all. She had already made a few jealous innuendos. He had looked at her indignantly: 'Me and Madame Poupaert, don't be silly'. She

was not his only extramarital girlfriend; Odette was sure of that. Tony led an unbridled life of sex, lies and videotaping, and she accepted that. 'I had quite a high libido myself, and like him, there was no better in bed,' she says. Tony was married but rarely at home. His wife seemed to have made peace with the situation.

Looking back on her time with Tony, she felt he had bewitched her. He was violent, brash, arrogant, possessive, and macho. She was a trendy, self-reliant woman and financially independent of him. Yet she let him command her willingly. 'He was completely engrossed in you. He tried to know everything about you. Sometimes, I felt that his head was a computer with a special program that could record and store every weakness of the people in his social circle. He liked to make people feel that he could blackmail them. I didn't dwell on that.'

Madame Poupaert remained a great mystery to Odette. Before seeing her in the flesh, she had formed the image of a beauty queen immune to the effects of ageing. That image turned out to be entirely incorrect. She thought she looked exactly as Tony had once described: 'An egg'. She had once seen Madame Poupaert with her little daughter. She estimated the child to be ten or eleven but hardly noticed it: 'She was a living doll, a quiet child dressed in a pleated skirt and freshly polished shoes. Her name was Regina. The last thing that occurred to me was that Tony rushed off to Ghent for that runt three or four times a week. I don't know what to think about the entire X1 affair and find it hard to believe that Tony had anything to do with child murders. Nevertheless... reading Regina Louf's book, I can't say anything other than that everything she writes about Tony is true. Right down to the smallest details. I found that disturbing.'*1

The Antwerp BOB interrogated Odette only once, in early 1998. The public prosecutor of Ghent, who later pretended to have looked into X1's childhood, did not know her story. Some elements of Regina's testimony, which at some later point will be labelled as 'incongruities in the statements of X1', suddenly seem much less unrealistic after a conversation with Odette. For example, on several occasions, X1 drove her interrogators to despair by not stating the answer when asked what route

she took to arrive at a particular place. Her excuse gradually sounded stereotypical. She said she hadn't noticed the way because Tony forced her to perform fellatio on him in the car. Odette brings it up herself during our meeting. 'Tony was truly the specialist on the subject. He got a kick out of that, which gave him a feeling of power. He would get into the right-hand lane, slow down to a hundred kilometres and press your head against his crotch. Sometimes, every car journey of half an hour or more was like that.' Tony V had more of those quirks. Women had to masturbate themselves on his command or penetrate vaginas with bottles and candles. Once, Odette witnessed Tony raping a friend of hers. He didn't seem to have a problem with that.

The mistress could do what young Regina Louf could not: complain, which typically resulted in clamorous scenes in which he smashed everything in her apartment. The police then came to evict Tony and record the incident. But Tony also had his charming side: small acts of kindness and flowers. The result was that after each complaint, she went back to the police to withdraw it. In connection with Madame Poupaert, Odette recalls that she had allowed herself to be extorted by Tony to purchase cinema advertising space for 120,000 Belgian francs, but she could not pay the bill. One hundred twenty thousand francs is also the amount X1 mentions when she says that she was 'sold' to Tony by her mother. 'He was a salesman of advertisement space in cinemas,' Odette explains. 'He was the most successful sales rep in his company. He was throwing money around. To him, a night out wasn't worthy of the name without opening twenty or thirty bottles of champagne. Sometimes, spending as much money as possible each weekend seemed the objective. He was perfectly bilingual and had his addresses all over Belgium.'

Except for one tiny fact: Odette has never noticed anything that might indicate child prostitution, distribution of porno, or child murder. On one occasion, though, she caught Tony V in her daughter's bed. The girl professed that nothing untoward had happened, although she thoroughly disliked her mother's new boyfriend. Her mother did notice that Tony V tried to supervise the fledgling teenager near-obsessively. He forbade

her to have a boyfriend and insisted on picking her up from school most of the time. Odd, the mistress thought, for someone who chases his penis constantly. Only now is she questioning some of the past events. 'I set some clear boundaries at the time. Tony tried to cross them a few more times, but nothing happened after that.'

It is clear to Odette that Tony knew people in high places all over Belgium. In Liege, the father of a local judge was his regular party companion. In Ghent, where he directed commercials in the early 1980s, he was a welcome guest in striptease bars. He was, says the mistress, close friends with the father of Véronique D and a family of entrepreneurs that X1 linked to several child murders. 'In that milieu, any occasion was good for a party. Tony had a lot of friends there. Although he was only a sales rep after all, and no more than that, it struck me how well they all knew him. I also remember a café in Ghent where he regularly met up with some gendarme commander.' In Antwerp, Tony also had a buddy in police circles: the gendarme BVH from Schoten. Tony V was fond of horses and was a familiar face in riding schools in Grobbendonk, Knokke, Bevekom and Libramont.

At the beginning of 1997, the antenna-Neufchâteau detectives did not know much about Tony, an apparent pivotal figure in their investigation. They found out, however, that he was still in contact with the parents of X1. Shortly after X1 mentioned during a conversation with her mother on November 16th 1996 that she wanted to lend her assistance to the investigation to ensure that no child would ever suffer the same fate as Julie and Melissa, her mother called Tony V.*2 Six months later, on May 28th 1997 at 7.50 p.m., the BOB registers a telephone call in the opposite direction. The call lasted just under nineteen minutes.*3

By the end of 1996, X1 had already mentioned a dozen women who might be able to confirm some further information about her childhood. In the first weeks of the new year, the antenna-Neufchâteau started to contact these women individually. It soon became clear that the worst possible method for them was to be upfront and directly admit that the Dutroux case was the reason for getting in touch. The first one to be contacted is Sandra D, who X1 pointed out as one of those who

witnessed the murder of Véronique D. Sandra D refused any contact. She couldn't remember anything about childhood hardships whatsoever.

On January 9th, the BOB initially received an equally dismissive reaction from Nora De Boodt.*4 Nora was a former friend of X1 who was allegedly raped

several times by Tony V and his friends when they vacationed together in Knokke. Witness X4 also selected an image of Nora from a set of photographs in mid-December. She stated that Nora was often used for pornographic pictures and movies.*5 Nora claims to have no recollection of these events at first. She keeps repeating that she doesn't see the point in collaborating. She admits she was indeed X1's best friend from age ten to fourteen. X1 had already moved to Ghent by then, and during vacations, Nora was sometimes allowed to visit her at the villa of X1's grandmother. Her recollections about these visits correspond to a fraction of X1's story. It was strictly forbidden to go to the second floor of the house. 'The grandmother was very strict.' She remembered that X1 had told her she was in love with Tony. 'Also, (X1's) mother was in love with that man.'

When the investigators ask her a few more pro forma questions about her childhood, Nora quietly talks about her father, who "touched" her a few times when she was fourteen. But no issues otherwise. Just before the investigators want to thank her for her time, Nora breaks down. Between tears, she mentions something about her father and 'things I can't talk about.'*6 The scenario repeats itself when the detectives knock on Nora's door a second time. The woman has undergone a slight metamorphosis in two days. She has dark circles under her eyes and makes an almost deathly impression. She reiterates that she doesn't understand why the BOB wastes her time. There was nothing amiss there in Knokke. At the end of the conversation, Nora convulses and murmurs something about 'monsters' that haunt her in her dreams.*7

Nora expresses her desire to cooperate during her third interrogation, but only as an anonymous witness. She also gets her code: X7. Her cooperation turns out to be a relative term.

She talks about anything and everything but rarely about her childhood friend X1. Whenever she sees a chance, she circles the tricky subject and describes her youth. Her sister has been in psychiatry for seven years and becomes hysterical whenever someone tries to touch her. 'Some terrible things must have happened', she says. Her father had a photo lab, which they were never allowed to enter during childhood. 'I know something happened to me, but I don't know what. I dare not look in the mirror and hate it when someone films or takes a picture of me. I often suffer from depression. Then I always flee into a room (...). During these interrogations, I constantly feel like crying, but I don't know why.'*8

The investigators try to interview her again in early March, but the longer the process takes, the fewer X7 talks about X1 and the more about her sister, her dad and her nightmares. She recalls that her dad habitually mutilated her sister with cigarette butts.*9 During the last interrogation, X7 finally manages to talk a bit more about X1 and Tony V. Still, she doesn't deliver anything more than a simple confirmation that they were in a sexual relationship.*10 'Something was up with that lady beyond a shadow of a doubt', says one investigator. 'She was an oyster which most likely contained a pearl for our inquiry. Unfortunately, we were not allowed the time to open that oyster.' Later, Ghent's BOB interrogates her, and Nora De Boodt shuts down completely. She doesn't trust these investigators at all and only agrees to talk after being told about rumours that pornographic video recordings of her have been found. She asks for an explanation. 'If only I could get things straight for myself. I have the feeling that they are leading me on.'*11

Many X1-skeptics consider it plausible that Regina Louf encountered Tony V between the ages of twelve and fifteen and that all her stories can be traced back to the sex games he played with her. It seems implausible in this case that she was sexually abused in the period before that when she was still living with her grandmother. Yet, there is one witness who did confirm this part of the story. X1 had already dropped her name during her second interrogation: Conny De Windt*12 from Knokke. Conny is one year older than X1. She is said to have been abused with her parents' knowledge in X1's grandmother's villa as a child prostitute. Witness X4 also

recognised her in a photo. X1 described how she and Conny were 'played off against each other' in Knokke. If one was uncooperative, the other had to pay the price. X1 was unsure whether Conny would be open to talking and advised the investigators to inquire with her about 'rooms 7 and 9'.

During the first contact with the investigators, Conny De Windt burst into tears.*13 She understood the topic of conversation immediately. Even before her first interrogation, she handed over a stack of writings and drawings from her youth and from the period she was admitted to the psychiatric ward of the municipal hospital in Bruges. Her story surfaces from cryptic images of devils with enormous genitals, naked men and women, scissors and vibrators. Conny De Windt is the first witness to confirm the gruesome facets of X1's story. She describes an image that stayed with her of the grandmother who threatened X1 with a pistol because she had refused to comply with a customer's wishes. In her own words, Conny also had to 'receive' customers herself. Confronted with some pictures of houses in Knokke, she points out X1's grandmother's villa as one of the addresses where the events occurred. *14 She remembers one occasion very vividly. In that villa, she was thrown on a bed by a man who forced her to give him a blow job. 'I don't remember who taught me, but I knew how to satisfy men orally. I was also anally raped there. I bit through the pain in the curtains.'*15

The lady was interrogated a total of four times. Her story emerges in a trickle, the details come into focus, and her reluctance to talk disappears. 'It always happened in one of two specific rooms in that grandmother's hotel, always the same ones,' she said on February 25th, 1997. 'I was told beforehand in which room I had to be.' Of the perpetrators, Conny De Windt remembers one name: Monsieur. It is one of the nicknames X1 mentioned during her very first interrogation.

She cannot recall any other names. 'Typically, the customers were not introduced to us,' she says. 'I know they spoke Dutch, and they just treated us like whores.'

According to Conny, X1's grandmother ensured the girls obeyed the customers. If they didn't, she whacked their fingers with an iron ruler. Depending on the client's wishes, she was tied to a bed by X1 or her grandmother. She sometimes had to tie up X1 as well. Often, they were required to make love together in front of a masturbating customer. Conny De Windt doesn't quite remember when it all happened. She believes the worst events occurred during the fourth year of primary school when she was nine to ten.*16

In early 1997, the testimony of Conny De Windt lent significant credibility to the X1 dossier. Although her account adds little to X1's revelations, she shows that -with some patience- even the most improbable parts of this story could be verified. On May 20th, however, Conny's interrogations end abruptly. In a phone call to the BOB, she reports that she no longer wants to cooperate. The tensions within her family have become untenable. Her husband did not know the full extent of her history. During the Whitsun weekend, she had a proper talk with him. As a result, he jumped into his car in a fit of rage and drove to her father's house to call him out. Conny's father admits that he took her 'a few times' to villas in Knokke on that occasion but claims he had no idea what was happening there. After further discussion, he talks about 'old histories' that are not worth stirring up and that perhaps his daughter would be better off being re-interned, which is precisely what happened. The day after the argument, Conny De Windt took a high dose of medication. She has already had four suicide attempts in the past few years, as it turns out later. No further attempts are made to talk to Conny. Upon questioning, her father tells investigators that 'it is all the fault of Connerotte's anonymous telephone outreach.' One week later, Conny was sectioned in a psychiatric institution.*17

It is remarkable how magistrates and police officers informed the public in early 1998 with straight faces that despite one and a half years of investigation, they 'found nobody' who could confirm X1's statements. The number of official police report pages about Nora De Boodt and Conny De Windt counts in the hundreds. Once, it also happened that an alleged offender of facts, as described by the X-witnesses, turned himself in to the police. This happened in December 1996.

A former treasurer of the Young Socialist Party Brussels' branch suddenly broke down in a Brussels restaurant. Possibly impacted by the publicity generated by the press about the search at Abrasax, he tells his female dinner companion a bewildering story about satanic rituals a lawyer and a notary took him to under the pretext of 'being taken in by higher circles'.

Children were killed in the process, the man claimed. His dinner companion informed the police of Woluwe-Saint-Lambert of the conversation, after which a policeman contacted the man a few weeks later. He was shaking like a leaf, claiming 'they' would know where to find him and only agreed to an interrogation if he did not have to sign anything.*18 Another week later, he told his story, and again, names that already sounded so familiar to the investigators of the Neufchâteau branch were mentioned again. They include the main suspect in dossier 96/111 and one of the men later identified by X1 as being involved in the murder of Katrien De Cuyper.*19 The man does not leave a great impression. His account of teenage girls being butchered with knives and their blood drunk by those present is accompanied by extreme paranoia. He talks about a life filled with threats, intimidation, a 'career broken by them' and suicidal thoughts. It turns out later that the man had already gone to the Woluwe gendarmerie to tell another ridiculous story. He is mental, says the First Sergeant who had met him there.*20 And that is where the investigation ended.

Among the girls she claims were 'tested' by Tony to check if they were "tradable", X1 named Myriam Verstraeten.*21 Little happened to her, she says, 'but she must have seen a lot'. X1 met Myriam in 1981, in the sixth year of primary school. X1 was already living in Ghent at the time. They were only in the same class for one year but remained friends. Myriam sometimes joined X1 on vacation in Knokke. According to X1, Tony V tried a few times to involve her in sex games but never succeeded. In one of her faxes, X1 writes that Myriam must have witnessed the brutality of her grandmother in Knokke and the sexual abuse by Tony.*22 When the antenna-Neufchâteau manages to track down Myriam Verstraeten, she

does not seem to remember much of that nature and says she did not notice anything unusual in Knokke. It was cosy there; that grandmother was a sweetheart of a woman, and she never noticed anything about X1's pregnancies or injuries. Myriam further paints an unflattering picture of X1. 'She was always alone on the school playground, didn't care much about personal hygiene and was sometimes hours late. She had a difficult personality.'

Myriam visited the dog grooming salon of X1's mother every Wednesday. She was flabbergasted. She remembers the cleaning lady wanting to bed everyone who crossed the threshold. 'There were sexual contacts between X1, Tony, the mother of X1 and the cleaning lady,' Myriam remembers. Tony V had once sent her away with a dubious excuse when she came calling at an inconvenient time. 'Sometimes I felt that my presence there was a nuisance.'²³ For the investigators, it remains a matter of conjecture to what extent the woman conceals certain things or gives an honest account. They do have a new potential witness: the cleaning lady C.V.

For the investigators who have the task of interrogating CV, it becomes difficult to believe that this environment could have once produced child prostitutes destined for top politicians and captains of industry.

On the contrary, the story seems to point more and more to that of a rather marginal family where everything revolves around sex and alcohol. CV is a working-class woman from Ghent who has no problem telling how she and her dog entered the salon of X1's mother one day and were welcomed with open arms, so much so that she could make it her refuge for three months when she got into trouble with her first husband and was left alone with an eighteen-month-old child. 'I became the cleaning lady there,' she recounts. 'It was obvious that Tony was in charge there. He came there almost every day and always brought wine. I thought he had something going on with the mother. He went to the riding school with the daughter. Yes, and sometimes he would sit in her room.'²⁴

CV was born in 1962. She was only twenty years old when she started her career as a cleaner with the X1 family. Apparently,

she didn't clean too much because, after Myriam, other testimonies emerged regarding that activity, which at least sounded unanimous: in that house, it was always a tip. When CV is questioned for a second time in early March, the story starts to sound more and more like *Les Misérables*. CV recalls her parents divorced when she was seven and her mother's suicide attempt two years later. She meets her first husband at sixteen and is pregnant for the first time at eighteen. With that child, an infant daughter, she moved in with the X1 family in 1982. In all, three different men will beget her four children. CV's life is an inextricable tangle of wrangling over custody. For ten years, she has been in therapy with a psychiatrist.*25

'It must have been quite a brothel there,' writes a detective from the antenna-Neufchâteau as a comment under the summary of a fax X1 sent on February 11th, 1997, about the cleaning lady. During her interrogations, X1 never mentioned CV because she could scarcely imagine that her role could be significant in investigating child murders.

CV had absolutely nothing to do with that either, writes X1. What annoyed her was that the woman seemed to take 'her' place in the family without question: 'She slept in my bed. Her child also slept in my room, and I had to sleep where there was space. I had no space of my own anymore. Tony, too, became different. He liked her, and I didn't care, but what hurt me was that he didn't pay me attention anymore(...). Many evenings, they sat around the table together: my mother, sometimes my father, W, Tony, Ad and whoever else Tony brought along (...). Usually, I had to drag her and my mother upstairs because they were too drunk to stand on their legs (...). It sounds crazy, but I was so embarrassed. I was ashamed when he took me while CV could be watching. I felt terribly annoyed whenever he groped the little daughter. I didn't want to see it anymore, not in my house.*26

On March 22nd 1997, X1 and CV faced each other at the Neufchâteau BOB HQ. The result of the confrontation turns into a win for X1. CV tends to overlook that whole period.

She initially insisted that she had not noticed any sexual contact between X1 and Tony V but did not realise that the entire encounter was videotaped. During one of the breaks,

she says that she knew about it -and was aware that X1 was only thirteen at the time- but adds that she saw no reason to make a big deal out of it. Everyone seemed to think it was normal. 'I don't believe she is lying,' says CV at some point during the confrontation, 'but I let go of my past and forgot all about it.' It was a period in which she drank a lot and lost her senses, warding off other questions from Adjutant Mertens. One statement stands out after the confrontation. At some point, X1 got CV to reveal why she suddenly left the Louf family after three months, head over heels. 'One day, my little daughter came to me crying,' she says. Two days later, we left that house (...). My daughter experienced behavioural disorders after staying with X1's parents, but she never wanted to discuss it.'*27 The fact that CV's child was only an eighteen-month-old baby at that time sheds new light on the case for investigators. They track down and question C V's daughter, who was already sixteen at the beginning of 1997, resulting in some tough interview sessions and panic reactions from the girl. However, they were dismissed from the inquiry before the De Baets team could delve deeper into this lead.

When, in March 1997, the investigators checked the incoming and outgoing calls on CV's telephone line, it appeared that in the days before and after her interrogations, she regularly communicated with X1's childhood friend Myriam Verstraeten and with mutual acquaintances. In one day, CV received 38 phone calls from family members and acquaintances who also contacted Myriam that same day. This could indicate that the two women aligned their stories.*28

The childhood friends of X1 probably couldn't imagine that their statements at the beginning of 1997 would give rise to a first in the history of the Belgian judicial system. There had been so many whispers about the imminent breakthrough in the Dutroux case that the heads of investigation had turned it into a litmus test for the police and the judiciary. It is said that the investigation be allowed to proceed as smoothly as ever. After consultation with the College of Public Prosecutors, the national magistrates André Vandoren and Patrick Duinslaeger were tasked at the beginning of 1997 to organise a meeting with all the magistrates from the various judicial districts once a month. Even though these meetings - five in all - in principle deal with all possible offshoots of the Dutroux case, X1

invariably dominates the agenda.*29 The interest in these meetings, held under the secret codename 'Obelix', is considerable. About thirty people are present each time. They include Duinslaeger and Vandoren themselves, the public prosecutors Michel Bourlet (Neufchâteau), Benoît Dejemeppe (Brussels) and Jean Soenen (Ghent), the substitutes Nicole De Rouck (Ghent) and Paule Somers (Brussels), the examining magistrates Michel Jordens (Antwerp), Jacques Langlois (Neufchâteau) and Jean-Claude Van Espen (Brussels), several gendarmerie officers -some from the CBO- the leaders of the BOB, Judicial Police detective teams and criminal analysts. All these people regard their knowledge about X1 and her statements as a state secret.

Leading up to the second meeting, on March 7th, 1997, the detectives of the antenna-Neufchâteau attended in the morning a presentation by the psychiatrist Paul Igodt, affiliated with the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL). At that time, the man had only just been involved in the investigation and did not yet have a defined opinion about the value of X1's testimony. He warns that the interrogation of a person with dissociative disorders is like walking on ice. Involving this type of victim in a judicial investigation is unique for Belgium. They require a particular approach. De Baets nevertheless receives credit for his improvisation and is told that he has not done too poorly. If De Baets and his colleagues found the morning very interesting, it was less so in the afternoon when they were confronted with the magistrates who were supposed to do something with this dossier sooner or later. For the investigators, it is as if they are being transported back to the time before August 1996. Liège Attorney General Anne Thily, who chaired the first meeting and is supposed to lead the second, has sent her cat. Last time, she did not hide her disinterest. She barely spoke a word but was nevertheless tasked with becoming the 'contact point' between Obelix and the College of Procurators General. Nor is the Gent prosecutor Soenen overflowing with enthusiasm. He is accompanied by substitute De Rouck, who seems to have to ask his permission for everything she does and says. It is unclear whether Soenen has actually read the documents he received on the Dellaert dossier.

Adjutant Mertens attempted to wake up this sedate company. That afternoon, he brought a video and let everyone, practically unannounced, watch one of the tapes of Jean-Paul Raemaekers. 'After that, the room went very quiet,' later says one of those attending. 'Afterwards, a criminal analyst from the CBO joined to provide some rationale, but nobody listened. Most of them sat there staring ahead, pale as death. For a moment, it looked as if the magistrates had finally realised what they were involved with, but afterwards, that hope turned out to be wishful thinking.'

That day, examining magistrate Van Espen reported on the state of affairs in the Van Hees dossier. It is clear to all present that this investigation has progressed the most. The participants agreed during the meeting that the public prosecutors of Ghent and Antwerp would not take any action for the time being, pending further developments in Brussels. In X1's account of the murder of 'Kristien', not a single politician, magistrate, or other prominent person is named - which leads many investigators to conclude that this is 'the easiest case'. What seems easiest comes first. Van Espen definitely played a vital role that day.

During the third steering meeting, an extensive discussion was held about the photos X1 was made to look at.*30 Isn't that, in fact, an invasion of privacy for these individuals? Can one show photos of ministers or members of parliament who enjoy immunity without first having consulted the Court of Cassation? No consensus is reached that day; the issue will be postponed to a subsequent meeting, only to be deferred yet again. This issue is intended to be submitted to the College of General Prosecutors through Thily. But Thily no longer shows up. Attorney General Alain Czaplicki replaces her. He calmly records the matters to be reported, and nothing more is heard. During the second meeting, Bourlet drew attention to the 'confessions' made by X1 in a fax concerning the murder of the girl from Brasschaat, Katrien De Cuyper. Bourlet believes the forced prostitution of which X1 became the victim can be regarded as an 'ongoing crime'. From this point of view, there

is no legal difference between X1 as a minor and an adult; therefore, it remains possible to continue questioning her as a witness. Since no one can predict what further revelations the interrogations will generate, Bourlet asks that the College of General Prosecutors provide advice or issue guidelines. Should X1 be arrested? Should some statute of informer be bestowed upon her, Czaplicki registers. Bourlet is still waiting.

When the newspaper Het Laatste Nieuws came out with the news one year later that Regina Louf had "confessed" to the murder of Katrien De Cuyper, public opinion was quick to collectively declare the witness insane.*31 Claude Eerdekens (PS), a member of the Verwilghen Commission, went so far as to ask aloud during a TV debate why she was not in prison. Lawyers have their say and talk about a derailed and poorly organised investigation. None of the people who participated in the Obelix meetings a year earlier said anything. According to the reports, the attention of the country's top magistrates in March 1997 went to an altogether different subject: who would act as press spokesperson?

In early 1998, in the middle of the X1-controversy, the newspaper De Standaard asked why the parents of X1 had never been questioned and pimp T had never been interrogated. This issue also resurfaced during the meetings on May 22nd, 1997. Connerotte promised X1 anonymity, and this commitment cannot be revoked like that unless on the initiative of X1 herself. All that the investigators can do is conduct discreet investigations around some childhood friends - which they do. Concerning the verification of X1's statements against the versions of the perpetrators she most frequently cited, we read in the meeting report: 'Problem of confrontation with T, Nihoul and Bouty is essential but premature.'*32 The magistrates and police officers decide nothing and resume discussing who will act as press spokesman. The meeting minutes are stated under the heading 'problems': *'Album-photos + relations with the press. Still no response!'**33

If there were ever a determined atmosphere, nothing would remain of it at the meeting on May 22nd, 1997. Within the Neufchâteau antenna, two camps of

investigators face each other with drawn knives. Commander Duterme and prime investigator De Baets are no longer on speaking terms. All the magistrates present at the Obelix meetings are aware of this. They hurry through their documents, straighten their glasses on their noses and do nothing else. A sixth meeting is planned for June 26th, 1997, but will never occur.

Shortly before Christmas 1996, rumours circulated in the editorial offices of various newspapers about a significant and spectacular action: a series of house searches for which the public prosecutor in Neufchâteau had rented a touring coach to transport a whole horde of VIPs to prison. It is perhaps the juiciest of all the X1 stories, but little or nothing of the story is true. In November 1996, BOB officer Michel Clippe was tasked with drafting an 'operation order', a standard procedure within the BOB for all significant investigations that may lead to a field operation. The operation order contains all the information needed to prepare search warrants. No search can be carried out without a mandate -to be delivered by an investigating judge. Jacques Langlois never even had to consider issuing such a mandate. The only person who felt the need to do so around Christmas was Michel Bourlet. However, there was no question of raiding the homes of this or that ex-minister or businessman. His proposal involved raiding the homes of people who had known X1 in her youth. In his view, time was at a disadvantage. Belgium is a country of gossip. It would not take long for all concerned to take their precautions.

'The big problem, in late December '96, was that some journalists had gotten wind of the X's existence,' says one investigator. Bourlet then thought it best to take immediate action. He then let slip to a journalist, by way of a witticism, something about a coach full of high-ranking people. Anyone who knows Bourlet knows a little about his sense of humour. The few journalists who were aware of this seemingly took it very seriously. Hence, the story took on a life of its own.'

At one point, a factual date is circulating for the wave of searches: December 23rd, 1996. Journalists told each other they had seen a coach in Neufchâteau, and a list awaits prominent Belgians at Zaventem airport who are no longer allowed to leave the country. But what actually happened on

December 23rd? Nothing. Clippe's operation order stood at thirteen targets. These are X1's childhood friends, family members, Tony V, and X1's home... The list includes one well-known name: lawyer E. Not even Annie Bouty is included in the operation order. 'Everyone wanted an intervention back then', De Baets recalls. 'There had to be a major intervention.' Everyone agreed: the top of the gendarmerie, the magistracy ... I resisted it at the time because I thought we required more evidence. I have 26 years of experience in judicial investigations. In all my cases, there were always lengthy preliminary searches. With a warrant, you enter the terrain, go public with

your inquiry and people are inevitably brought into disrepute. Before you compromise someone, you must be sure, I think. A house search is, in fact, the last step, a formality with which you gather the conclusive evidence for what is by now 99 per cent certain. That's what I wanted back then: more verification, more observation... Everyone knows you can't appear before an assize court with Regina Louf. I assumed we would continue interrogating her for a year or two or three, carry out parallel checks, and only then go public. Apparently, some people were in a big hurry.'

Former investigators of the antenna-Neufchâteau comment that at the end of December 1996, furious arguments erupted between Bourlet and De Baets. 'That's correct,' says the adjutant. 'He wanted action. He repeatedly told me, 'Damn it, De Baets, with Dutroux, we had much less evidence in our hands, yet we were doing searches.' 'I tried to clarify to him that this was not the case. Back then, they had part of a license plate, and a child had been kidnapped. We were working with a victim about whom we still had far too little information.'*34

And yet, say former colleagues of De Baets, Bourlet had it right. 'The X1 dossier had not yet been decentralised at the end of 1996,' remarks one investigator. 'Neufchâteau was still doing what it wanted. It was the last chance to benefit from the goodwill created by the Dutroux case. Our superiors begged us to do something meaningful. All those on the

investigative team remember how Colonel Berkmoes of the CBO visited us at the end of 1996 and said word for word: 'You are the saviours of the gendarmerie.' Our corps stood under heavy fire in parliament in those days. They wasted all the credit with the Abrasax case and those absurd excavation works in Jumet.*35

By mid-February, the operation order already counted 43 targets. De Baets still thought it was too early and Bourlet too late. 'That's when the tide started to turn,' De Baets remembers. Commander Duterme asked about the operation order, and we updated him on the situation. He said that five or six searches should be sufficient.

On March 20th, 1997, the 'big action' takes place anyway, but no journalist is informed. Instead of 43 addresses, only one is targeted: Morekstraat 169 in Ghent. It is the rented house of Regina Louf and her husband.*36 That day, a team of BOB officers, led by first sergeant Luc Vergnon, searched X1's house by order of Van Espen.*37 A videocassette about MPS ("Multiple Personality Syndrome"), a clipping from the weekly magazine Knack, a notebook with personal notes, copies of all faxes sent by X1 to De Baets, four albums with family pictures and a folder with notes on her personalities are confiscated.*38 Regina Louf is bewildered and scolds the investigators: 'I hope you will house search the perpetrators next time!' Later, she shows understanding, especially when she learns that they were actually looking for newspaper clippings from which she could have drawn her knowledge about the murder of Christine Van Hees. No such newspaper articles are found. Three days after the house search, she hands over some documents the detectives have overlooked. Among the books she delivers to the police - 'may be interesting for your investigation' - is a red notebook she has used as a diary since 1989.*39 She found it in a cardboard box in a dusty room that had not been opened since a previous move. Chief Warrant Officer Danny De Pauw, who was tasked to search the room, had an allergic condition, only stayed inside for a short time and overlooked the notebook. Later, it became clear that this notebook was overflowing with information vital to the investigation.

One of the rare decisions taken on April 25th 1997, during one of the Obelix meetings, is recruiting a college of five experts to conduct psychiatric evaluations on X1. The initiative had been taken months earlier by Sergeant De Baets, but since magistrates from all corners of the country were getting involved in the case, things were moving a bit slower.*40 The five members each have their specialisation and are expected to arrive together, each from their professional perspective, at an evaluation of X1 and her testimony. The college will be led by the neuropsychiatrist Professor Paul Igodt (Royal University Louvain) and further consists of his colleagues Peter Adriaenssens, Herman Vertommen, the doctor Johan Vanderlinden from the psychiatric clinic in Kortenberg, and psychiatrist Rudy Verelst (Royal University Louvain). Child psychiatrist Peter Adriaenssens was given the particular task of examining the children of X1 because of his specialisation, but he never got around to it.

The college receives the assignment to investigate the memory of X1 and check whether there has been any suggestibility from the detectives during their interrogations.*41 The fact that this is mentioned in so many words in the assignment of examining magistrate Van Espen makes it clear that at the end of April, someone had already briefed him about the dossier's "rereadings", which had begun in secret under the instruction of commander Duterme. Up to that point, nobody has made any negative comments about the course of the interrogations. On the contrary, they are praised here and there as "exemplary". The only ones who think otherwise are Duterme and some of his faithful.

'I sensed that the psychiatrists themselves quickly realised that their work was already redundant,' says Regina Louf. 'The start of it roughly coincided with the dismissal of De Baets. In all, I spent more than thirty hours on conversations and psychological tests. Sometimes, these tests were quite childish, but these people tried to do an honest job. They were stuck between a rock and a hard place, I think. They were in touch with the investigators, who presumably told them I was crazy. There was always this vibe when they talked to me: "Well, we think you're OK, but they tell us that..." During a final conversation, Vertommen advised me not to accept any proposals -if any- to submit to interrogation under hypnosis.

He advised me to think of my family and to resign myself to the fact that my testimony would be of little use to them.'*42

Upon consultation with scientists, one rarely receives a black-or-white answer, usually many shades of grey. This is also true with Professor Igodt's eight-page report to Van Espen on October 8th, 1997. This report indicates -as X1 already did from day one- that they are dealing with someone suffering from a dissociative identity disorder. Igodt even speaks at some point of a 'borderline personality disorder'. But, he adds: 'Thanks to years of therapy, the person concerned has succeeded (...) in achieving a certain integrated way of functioning, and the different personalities (alters) in her, of which she can name several, work together quite well and the person concerned knows how to exercise control over each of these parts of the personality quite well; in such a way that there is only a limited and exceptional loss of control. A situation that was also noticeable during the clinical psychiatric anamnestic examination. Apart from somewhat uncontrolled laughter, especially concerning the most horrible sexual abuse, the patient could control herself quite well, and no dissociative changes were noticeable. As already mentioned, this is probably largely due to the relatively long period that the patient has been in psychotherapy.'

Concerning the question as to how this came about, Igodt emphatically pleads in favour of X1: 'The clinical psychiatric anamnestic investigation does confirm the suspicion of massive sexual abuse in the history of the person concerned. Whether this abuse occurred and was effectively significant in terms of intensity, it seems that the answer must be in the affirmative. This massive abuse also seems to be the main etiological factor for the psychiatric syndromes present, which conforms with the abundant research findings on this subject.'

Despite the rickety verbiage, the Igodt report can conceivably be regarded as one of the rare objective investigative elements added to the dossier after the summer of 1997. He points out the dangers of 'contamination' of X1's memory -'without any intentional deception'- caused by her therapy, her interest in her situation and her clear motivation to fight against child sexual abuse. Igodt explains that the credibility of what a person remembers about their childhood can be measured by

how it is told. If the account takes the form of a 'streamlined narrative' without doubts, then there is a good chance that the story is fabricated or 'reconstructed'. The more confused the testimony sounds, the more authentic his contention is. After all, testifying about something you experienced as a child should sound almost as if a child told it. Next, Igodt says that X1 delivers her account as 'a reasonably well-streamlined story'. It is very much the question of what data the professor relies on, apart from his conversations with X1, to come to that determination. Anyone who reads the texts of X1's interrogations would not be immediately inclined to define these as "streamlined". Igodt watched some videotapes of interrogations and later admitted that a shift was perceptible in how X1 talked about her past.

Halfway through his report, Igodt also lets on that X1's testimony apparently 'does not correspond, or only partially corresponds, to objectively verified factual data.' The fact that this is cited in so many words lends an idea about how De Baets' successors 'guided' the College of Experts. Virtually all of the supposed 'objective data' that Dutermé and his crew play with are the product of the so-called reports of rereading. The next chapter will show how relative those 'objective data' are.

The professor has further reservations about the way the interrogations were conducted. He fears that the bond between De Baets and X1 has become too intimate and that an all too emphatic expectation pattern has played a role in X1's being stimulated to relate additional and more gruesome facts. Despite all this, the expert does not express an opinion about X1's credibility in his conclusion. As a matter of fact, he kicks in an open door: 'Concerning the validity and credibility of the testimony, it must be stated that given the years of therapy, the repeated interrogations and the own reading matter of the person concerned, a lot of contamination of the memory has already taken place, which makes it very difficult to assess the truthfulness of the testimony (...) In conclusion, it can be stated that information from the person concerned can only be meaningful as an element for further investigation and can introduce new leads. Certainly, it cannot be used as evidence

without confirmation by other objective sources. It should be pointed out that future hearings are best conducted in as neutral a climate as possible. For this purpose, reference should be made to the recommendations mentioned above.'*43

The Igodt report allows for many interpretations. If some careful picking and choosing from this report is provided, the entire X1 story can be debunked. Those who confine their citations to the passage about the 'massive sexual abuse' and Igodt's theory about a streamlined or not streamlined account can utilise the report with equally strong arguments as a kind of proof of authenticity for X1. This is precisely what happened after the eruption of the media storm around X1. For most of the press, the inclusion of the term 'borderline' is enough to decide that X1 belongs in a psychiatric facility rather than in an interrogation room. Professor Igodt protested against his report's one-sided interpretation in early 1998. He did so on RTL-TV, among others.*44 During a debate with some journalists and Regina Louf herself, he delivers a futile plea to end the conviction debate. He calls Regina Louf, taking her past into account, an exceptionally level-headed woman whose testimony may well have its importance. Igodt is immediately told that he is a *believer*.

NOTES:

1. Conversation with former friend Tony V, November 10th, 1998. Odette is a pseudonym.
2. Tony V did not answer the phone—findings Brussels BOB, December 17th 1996, PV 118.725.
3. Findings Brussels BOB, May 29th 1997, PV 151.517.
4. Pseudonym
5. Interrogation X4, Brussels BOB, December 14th, 1996, PV 118.575.
6. Interview with Nora De Boodt, Brussels BOB, January 9th 1997, PV 100.526.
7. Interview with Nora De Boodt, Brussels BOB, January 11th 1997, PV 100.528.
8. Interrogation X7, Brussels BOB, February 1st, 1997, PV 150.027.

9. Interrogation X7, Brussels BOB, March 1st 1997, PV 150.434.
10. Interrogation X7, Brussels BOB, May 14th 1997, PV 150.754.
11. Interview with Nora De Boodt, February 1998.
12. Pseudonym.
13. Interview with Conny De Windt, Brussels BOB, January 7th, 1997, PV 100. 107.
14. Findings Brussels BOB, February 17th, 1997, PV 150,154.
15. Interview Conny De Windt, Brussels BOB, February 4th, 1997, PV 150.816.
16. Interrogation of Conny De Windt, Brussels BOB, February 25th, 1997, PV 150.817.
17. Findings Brussels BOB, May 21st and June 4th, 1997, PV's 151.525 and 151.441.
18. Police Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe, January 8th, 1997, PV 250 Z156.
19. Interrogation, police Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe, January 16th, 1997, PV 466 Z156.
20. BOB Brussels, February 17th, 1997, PV 150.346.
21. Pseudonym.
22. Fax X1, Brussels BOB, January 15th, 1997, PV 150.012.
23. Interrogation Myriam Verstraeten, Brussels BOB, February 4th, 1997, PV 150.106.
24. Interrogation C.V., Brussels BOB, February 10th, 1997, PV 150.109.
25. Interrogation C.V., Brussels BOB, 2 March 1997, PV 150.546.
26. Fax X1, Brussels BOB, February 11th, 1997, PV 150.310.
27. Confrontation C V with X1, Brussels BOB, March 22nd 1997, PV 150.885.
28. Findings BOB Brussels, March 25th 1997, PV 150.767.
29. The meetings took place on these dates: February 22nd, March 7th, March 21st, April 25th, and May 22nd, 1997.
30. Among other things, De Baets confronted her with photographs of magistrates and gendarmerie officers.
31. Het Laatste Nieuws, January 27th, 1998.

32. Obelix meeting report, May 22nd, 1997, A.3/145/97.
33. The first answers from the College of PGs, regarding the photos and the question of who will speak, materialise on June 16th, 1997. It is then stated that the press must contact the spokeswoman of the gendarmerie, who in turn must get in touch with the competent magistrate. The PG provides no advice about the 'confessions' of X1. Letter from national magistrate Van Heers to examining magistrate Van Espen, July 8th 1997, ref. A3/145/97-0.
34. Interview with Patriek De Baets, October 8th 1998.
35. In its second final report, the Verwilghen Commission later writes: 'On December 16th 1996, Colonel Berkmoes visited the Neufchateau investigation team. He promised his total support to the members of the team. As far as working resources are concerned, he states that the investigations of Neufchâteau have every priority and that one should not hesitate to perform overtime or work over the weekend, etc.... when necessary for the investigation.'
36. The couple will move to a small farmhouse in De Pinte a few months later.
37. The house search of Regina Louf's home, BOB Brussels, March 20th, 1997, PV 150.822.
38. For proper understanding, 'personalities' refer to the various characters Regina Louf developed as a Multiple Personality Syndrome patient. Her therapist advised keeping these notes.
39. BOB Brussels, March 24th 1997, PV 150.757.
40. On January 24th, 1997, the Neufchâteau team received an official directive from the Brussels substitute Paule Somers.
41. Investigating judge Van Espen to P Igodt, P Adriaenssens, H Vertommen, J. Vanderlinden and R Verelst, Brussels, April 30th 1997.
42. Interview with Regina Louf, February 13th, 1999.
43. Expert report of witness X1. Professor Paul Igodt, October 8th, 1997.
44. *Controverse*, RTL-TV, January 15th, 1998.

4. 'That young man was confronted by the suspects, and fourteen days later he was dead'.

Sylvie, abductee, Charleroi Court of Justice, 1993.

All Pascal Meunier wanted to do was try to prevent two girls from being kidnapped and raped. One girl was sixteen, the other seventeen. They are still alive. Pascal Meunier is not. When his parents appear on the street in Gosselies, their former acquaintances stare them down. If anyone does address them, it is to tell them they should be "ashamed".

It is the 21st of May 1989. In a café in the centre of Charleroi, Pascal Meunier (24) meets two girlfriends, Laurence (17) and Sylvie (16). He strikes up a conversation with Laurence, whom

he has known for some time. Sylvie is in conversation with Paolo. Pascal was with an American girl for a while. Paolo had raped this girl. She did not dare to file a complaint but, on the contrary, had travelled back to the U.S. in a hurry. 'Sylvie should be weary of that guy,' Pascal tells Laurence.

'I think Paolo Di Giorgio sensed right away that I knew a thing or two about him,' Laurence later reflected. 'At one point, he dragged Sylvie to the exit. Another older-looking man grabbed me and dragged me too.' Pascal tries to intervene, but someone at the bar following the incident stops him. 'He yelled as loudly as we did, but no one reacted,' says Laurence. 'When they pushed us into the car, I saw Pascal run outside anyway. He stood on the sidewalk and said he would call the police. Paolo turned around, looked at him and said he would know how to find him.'

The incident happens in seconds. The car speeds off with the two girls in the back seat. Pascal notes the license plate on his left arm. The people in the café tell him he's crazy when he asks to make a call. Those two men, they tell him, are known to be extremely dangerous. And that one, the fifty-year-old with his expensive tailored suit, has 'connections at the very highest levels'. Pascal shrugs his shoulders and calls the gendarmerie.

Two days later, Pascal learns through the newspaper how the events unfolded. The two men have driven with Laurence and Sylvie to Rosée, a village south of Charleroi. The man in the suit, who turns out to be LV, reserved a hotel room where the two girls were drugged and raped several times. Their ordeal lasted until the early hours of the morning. Di Giorgio took pictures of the naked girls in bed with LV. He told them he would show them to their parents if they ever dared to disclose what happened. When the two men, somewhat drunk, lay down on the bed, Sylvie took a pocketknife from her coat pocket. Laurence took it from her and stabbed Paolo's throat. Thereupon, she jumped through the window, broke her wrist four meters below, and ran off naked through the streets of Rosée. In shock, she arrived at a helpful farmer's wife, who called the gendarmerie. The two men were arrested, but strangely enough, the investigating judge Delvaux in Dinant only charged Paolo Di Giorgio with indecent assault. LV was

only accused of complicity.*1 Pascal Meunier has barely finished reading the article when he calls the gendarmerie.

'If only he hadn't done that,' sighs father André Meunier. 'Paolo has threatened my son loud and clear. He said, "You are dead!" Sylvie and Laurence, who were also there, confirmed that.'

Twelve days later, Pascal Meunier was dead. That Saturday night, the 3rd of June 1989, he left home with his brother and girlfriend for a night out. The first stop is Jimmy's Dancing in the *basse ville* of Charleroi. Pascal pays for the first round of drinks. The glasses are barely on the table when someone asks Pascal if he can come to the entrance of the dancing. His brother and girlfriend stay a while, get worried, and eventually start looking for Pascal. They searched all night. They never see Pascal again. It is five AM when a nightclub doorman sees a chap squatting in front of a shop window. He gives the seemingly drunken lad a push. The body topples over like a rigid mannequin. 'In the afternoon, we had to go and see him in the hospital,' André Meunier remembers. 'I always thought they at least wrapped a corpse in a cloth or something. Not in this case. Take him away soon, they said. I asked them what had happened. You know very well, they replied: an overdose.'*2

We know that heroin usage can exhibit nasty side effects, but not that it could induce bruises and contusions. That is, nevertheless, what father and mother Meunier see on the head of their dead son. The death certificate was drawn up by the coroner Beauthier from Charleroi. As it turned out later, his report did not mention these injuries. He attributes the cause of death to a heroin overdose. Dr Beauthier performed no autopsy but merely subjected the remains to an external examination and took a blood sample. When Pascal Meunier's parents hear this -they do not get to see the medical report- they react with disbelief. Their son did use soft drugs in the past but had quit for quite some time. His brother took a camera and snapped pictures. 'We took the pictures just before the coffin closed,' says father Meunier. He takes them out of a brown envelope. We see Pascal's peaceful facial expression, with a clearly visible bruise in the middle. He could also have fallen after a dose of heroin, of course. 'No,'

says father Meunier vehemently. Again, he digs into the envelope and pulls out a certificate written by the Meuniers' family doctor on the 7th of June, 1989. He examined the corpse just before the coffin was closed. Doctor Brickmanne states: 'The body shows clear traces of frontal contusions. The skull is dented (...). Contusions on the neck and the left ear (...). All these observations lead me to conclude that this may be a suspicious death and that the death was probably caused by the infliction of blows with one or more blunt objects.'*3

Usually, an autopsy is performed when a doctor arrives at such findings. Now, no one has ever claimed that Charleroi is a typical city. Prosecutor Backeland and substitute Delpierre aren't interested. Instead of conducting a proper investigation into the cause of Pascal Meunier's death, the Judiciary Police of Charleroi searched his parent's home. André Meunier is a former soldier. He once fought in the Belgian Congo and collected military antiquities in his senior years. Pascal, who served in an elite Commando brigade of the Belgian Infantry (Chasseurs Ardennais), was also interested in military memorabilia. The Judiciary Police record an impressive arsenal.*4

The parents hurriedly went to the public prosecutor's office to hand over the film of the pictures they had taken. The parents believe it will prove that their son was murdered, a proper autopsy will be conducted, and the misunderstanding will be cleared up. They get no response, however. The authorities have already released the body, and they are kindly asked to pick it up and arrange their son's funeral as soon as possible. The parents are given some of their son's belongings. The jumper he was wearing when he died, among other things. Some clay sticks to the garment. It is also quite frayed. These are potential indicators that the body was pulled along a surface. They don't receive the scarf found around his neck in the morning. The brother, sister-in-law and mother are adamant Pascal was not wearing a scarf when he left home that night. His mum is sure about that because she had asked her son if it wasn't too cold before she kissed him and said goodbye. His corpse did sport a scarf.

LV fared much better than Pascal Meunier. He was released two days after his arrest for the events in Rosée. He

immediately restarted kidnapping and violating girls. He paid several accomplices 15,000 Belgian francs per abduction. Everyone knows Pascal Meunier's tragic fate in the basse ville area of Charleroi. The general determination is that it would be best not to cross LV's path. Teenage girls are advised by their older friends to stay away from him and, if that doesn't work, to not resist the torture. Going to court is strongly discouraged. Not everyone followed that advice. On the 8th of May, 1991, LV was arrested again after the Rosée scenario had been repeated. This time the kidnapper is not Paolo but a certain Mohammed Iziz. He dragged two girls into LV's car, who then raped them in hotel rooms reserved for him. After only a few days, LV is released.

Four years after the events in Rosée, the trial of the rape of Laurence and Sylvie starts in the criminal court of Namur. Only Paolo is in the dock. LV got off scot-free, even though he had been arrested several times since May 1989 for precisely the same crimes. During the trial, Sylvie takes the floor: 'I would like to add something, Mr Chairman, about that night when we were abducted in Charleroi. Only one of the thirty people in the café who witnessed the events intervened. That individual was confronted by the suspects, and fourteen days later, he was dead. No investigation into his death was ever conducted.'*5

Pascal Meunier's parents have a lawyer. His name is Michel Bouchat. For criminal cases, he is a good lawyer. Michèle Martin (Dutroux' ex-wife and accomplice) knows that too. He was the first person she called when she was arrested in Neufchâteau in August 1996.*6 Bouchat wrote countless letters to substitute Delpierre, from whom he learned that Dr Beauthier's medical report (of Pascal Meunier) had unfortunately "been misplaced." It was not until the beginning of 1990 that Bouchat finally managed to arrange a consultation with Madame Substitute. A report has now surfaced. According to Mrs Delpierre, the heroin thesis was confirmed by a second blood analysis conducted by Dr Renaux. He claims traces of cannabis, heroin and Temgesic were detected in Pascal Meunier's blood.*7 'We did not ask for a blood analysis', says André Meunier. We consider it perfectly possible, quite likely actually, that they disguised the murder of our son by stuffing him full of narcotics. This Paolo had

plenty of acquaintances in his entourage who could kill someone without leaving too many traces. We wanted the body to be inspected for blows and injuries. But that didn't happen.'

The day after the bodies of Julie and Melissa were found, a hysterical woman rings the doorbell of Pascal Meunier's parents. She has been drinking, seems completely out of herself and waves a stack of documents under his nose. It is Sylvie's mother. She wants André Meunier to accompany her to Neufchâteau 'so that the entire gang can be rounded up'. Meunier is unconvinced and is wary of going anywhere with a woman in her condition. 'She left and didn't contact me again after that,' says Andre Meunier. 'It seemed too insane to me to assume that there could be a connection with the Dutroux case. I thought she got into a state because of what she had seen on television.'

Sylvie's mother is not the only one who sees a correlation. A week after the Dutroux case erupted, substitute Staudt of the Dinant prosecutor's office turns to his colleagues in Neufchâteau. A 29-year-old woman has contacted him. She had been abused several times by LV since 1982, when she was fifteen. Her parents ran a hotel. LV occasionally rented a room to rape minors and videoed them. The mother of the girl knew about it but kept silent. Her entire childhood was characterised by the comings and goings of sex addict LV. He once offered her 15,000 francs to act in a movie. 'LV. is a close acquaintance of Michel Nihoul,' says the woman. 'At the end of the eighties, they regularly dined together in the snack bar Nic-Nac near the Brussels Rogier Tower.'*8

Even before the lady had told her story, the Brussels BOB had already begun to take an interest in LV via another lead. On the 24th of August, during a house search in Sars-la-Buissière, detectives found a copy of the French magazine Actuel dating from 1986 and a name written on it: "Eloy Henri, 1130". Eloy is the name of an inmate who did some time in 1986 in the prison of Jamioulx at the same time as Dutroux. When interviewed, he explained that he never knew Dutroux but considered it likely that his Actuel ended up in Dutroux's cell through barter. 'The person who can help you is G,' he says. He knows a lot about Dutroux.*10 G is a Turk who knows the criminal milieu in Charleroi like the back of his hand. He runs a café in that city.

When the BOB knocks on G's door, he needs no encouragement. 'I often saw Dutroux in the café Prince de Liège,' says G. 'He sometimes met up there with LV. He is a known paedophile. Complaints have been made against him several times.' That did not help much. G knows a Moroccan woman whom LV had his family name tattooed above her vagina. She was still a child at the time. She is married now, says G, but she still lives under his psychological terror.*11

More information is pouring in. For years, LV has been preying on underprivileged families in and around Charleroi to 'rent' children for around 50,000 francs. Pornographic photos would be made of the children.*12 An informant reports that Michael Diakostavrianos drove around in LV's Citroën CX for a while. However, in the chaos of cars, wrecks and dubious papers of Dutroux's accomplice in the car swindle, no proof will ever be found that it was the same car.

In Neufchâteau, at the end of September 1996, LV becomes the target of yet another side dossier. It concerns PV 139/96 of Jean-Marc Connerotte. He orders LV to be followed for several weeks and has his telephone calls tapped. After a few weeks, this resulted in a considerable amount of paperwork. LV is a busy bee, making hundreds of calls a day. With pimps in Brussels, with human traffickers in Romania, with Chinese restaurant owners, with Hainaut crooks, with a gendarme from the Walcourt brigade... LV himself lives in Walcourt. He calls the gendarme sometimes at his work, sometimes at his home.*13 The volume of leads soon overwhelms the Neufchâteau investigators. Several Walloon public prosecutors have received testimonies that strongly resemble the story of the 29-year-old woman. LV seems to have been on the road at least once a month for fifteen years to abduct and violate girls. And every testimony has the same ingredients: accomplices, hotel rooms, photos, threats of blackmail through the parents, and collections of pictures of girls that LV has on offer....

LV is a Frenchman. His brother is the mayor of a southern French town. Professionally, as an exclusive importer in the food sector, he is a welcome guest at receptions of all kinds in Charleroi and the surrounding area. He seems to keep a low profile in the weeks after the Dutroux affair. At the annual food fair in Charleroi, where he was a prominent attendant year

after year, he was conspicuous by his absence at the end of 1996. According to a recently dismissed company employee, LV is moving his entire business to France.

A phone call to Interpol France yielded interesting information to Neufchâteau detectives in mid-October. He is known to the French judiciary for various sex offences - including pimping - committed between 1960 and 1972. On the 30th of July, 1995, he was stopped by the gendarmerie in Lyon. Three Romanian girls were discovered in his van; one was only sixteen years old, but also ten blanco guardianship certificates from the municipality of Walcourt.*14 With such documents, V could pose as the 'guardian' of the children he was transporting. The story becomes completely improbable when Brussels BOB officers try to map out the judicial trail. Dozens of times, victims or their parents have gone to court with complaints of rape, but it is striking how often these are retracted afterwards. One can assume that what follows is only the tip of the iceberg.

The furthest back in time, a file could be found by the Brussels BOB from the public prosecutor's office of Charleroi: case number 318/83 of investigating judge Lacroix. It concerns a complaint of rape against Patricia C.*15 On the 23rd of September 1983, the case was dismissed due to lack of evidence. One year later, a new rape complaint was filed, also with the public prosecutor of Charleroi. Together with two other files, again related to rape, it remained untouched for years. One of the three complaints was attached to another file concerning LV in Charleroi, of which nothing more was heard. In 1988, the Brussels public prosecutor opened an investigation (BR 381146/88) following the complaint of a girl who said she had been kidnapped and raped by LV and his accomplices. Photographs were also taken, intended to be traded as pornography. The Brussels public prosecutor was able to seize those photos but decided to dismiss the case due to a lack of evidence. A series of complaints against LV by various public prosecutors nationwide for fraud, extortion, theft, and 'uttering threats' were also dismissed.

On the 15th of December, 1986, LV and a companion were arrested for kidnapping and raping Daphné R. The scenario from Rosée is repeated: LV spent 59 days in pre-trial detention

in Jamioulx. These facts led to the only conviction that would ever befall LV. On the 24th of October, 1989, the disciplinary court of Charleroi pronounced the sentence: two years in prison with suspension, minus the 59 days in pre-trial detention. LV was allowed to walk free. The fact that five months earlier, he had kidnapped, abused and raped Sylvie and Laurence was irrelevant, according to the court. LV did not come into contact with the justice system again for a year and a half. On the 18th of March, 1991, he was arrested near Namur together with Mustapha Iziz and Paolo, his accomplice from Rosée. The modus operandi has little variation. Together with this duo, LV. picked up two underage girls in a café, took them to a hotel and there severely assaulted and raped them. The modus operandi of the Belgian justice system is monotonous: LV again remains only a few days in the cell. On the 8th of May, the investigating judge Marotte from Namur issued an arrest warrant for Iziz, Paolo and L.V. He was arrested on the 18th of June 1991.

The arrest was made somewhat under pressure from the media, which reported on 'the incorrigible rapist from Walcourt'. Some of the victims read it and felt encouraged to file a complaint. Again, there is talk of abduction, rape, photographs and blackmail. LV spent nine days in jail. On the 27th of June 1991, his lawyers succeeded in having him admitted to a psychiatric institution in Auvelais: LV is mentally ill. He went into psychiatric care for three months. All subsequent accusations against LV will be countered with 'cannot be held accountable'. At the beginning of 1993, it looked as if Mustapha Iziz, Paolo Di Giorgio and LV would have to appear before the Namur correctional court for the whole list of charges brought by Marotte. Some files were transferred from Charleroi, where the complaints continued to pour in. When the court in Namur wanted to summon him, his lawyers challenged the decision until the Liège chambers. There, on the 6th of March 1993, L.V. was not prosecuted because of "mental illness".*16 This status did not prevent him from setting up a business with Romanian teenage girls and even less from successfully developing his business - even though the company is now in the name of his wife, who seems to think that everything is fine.

Interrogating victims of LV is a tricky business. Most of them refused to reveal their secret past to Neufchâteau. Some women have noted that LV resembles Michel Nihoul as two drops of water. They wonder if they are sure in Neufchâteau that they have arrested the right one. Geneviève C. describes how, when she was sixteen, LV forced her to give him a blowjob in front of the camera and how he pounded her head against the wall to keep up the rhythm. Halfway through her interrogation, the young woman collapses.*17 From Florence R., the investigators get a similar story. When she was fifteen, she was the sole breadwinner of the family. LV gifted her jewels, clothes, champagne and five thousand francs per turn*18 The 29-year-old woman, thanks to whom the link is made with the Dutroux case, tells how she could not possibly tell her story at the time, in 1984, 'because the police officers were friends with LV'. She was sixteen years old at the time. She was prevented from saying that she had had to pose for child pornography. She confirms her earlier story about the meetings between Nihoul and LV in the snack bar near the Brussels Rogier Tower.¹⁹ That could be true. At the time, Nihoul was running a commercial radio station from the Rogier Tower. The one rare time that L.V. spent more than a few days in prison was a few weeks next to the cell next to Marc Dutroux's. They chat with one another during the daily walk outside. The subject of their chats is not known. A detainee who shared the cell with Dutroux during the same period later says that the latter made no secret of his plans to kidnap and lock up young girls again*21 Until 1993, Paolo Di Giorgio lived in Marcinelle near Dutroux's infamous home. LV is a regular at Le Carré Blanc, a bar near Dutroux's house.*22

On the 20th of December 1996, a detective from the Neufchâteau branch, where a seven-strong team is now in charge of the 139196 dossier, knocked on the door of the Charleroi public prosecutor's office. At the registry, he came across the remains of what should have been the investigation into the death of Pascal Meunier. Among other things, he found the role of film. It was never developed. The parents do get their movie back. Seven years after the event, they developed it themselves, removing doubts from father and mother Meunier.*23 Doctor Beauthier maintains that the boy died of an overdose. Yes, he saw the bruises and bumps, too, he says, but he maintains that they must have been inflicted

post-mortem. In his little house in Gosselies, André Meunier lost his nerve. Have you ever heard of someone who sees a dead body in the street and thinks: "Hm, a corpse? I'm going to beat it up some more." Not me. My son was killed twice. Once by the accomplices of the paedophiles against whom he should never have testified, and a second time by the Charleroi public prosecutor's office, which published reports in the newspapers that Pascal was a junkie and even used his death to point out the major problem of heroin addicts in the city. Pascal's friends combed the entire area around the Jimmy's that night. Five hours later, he was found 28 meters from the dance hall entrance. They had passed by there twenty times by then.' At the end of 1997, prosecutor Merchandise decided that the investigation into Pascal Meunier's death would not be reopened.

Today, LV is relieved of all worries. On the advice of Commander Duterme of the Neufchâteau branch, Investigating Judge Langlois decided, on the 11th of July 1997, to have the 139/96 file "reread".*24 The reread was done by investigators who had nothing to do with the case up to that point. When they had finished shortly after the summer of 1997, it appeared that they had little to say about the investigation work done up to that point under the leadership of Sergeant Christian Pirard. A key point in the rereading is the suggestion that G. be interviewed again about what he can remember about the links between LV and Dutroux. And there is something else. The Lyon correctional court convicted LV in early 1997 of trafficking Romanian girls. The French investigation revealed that he was the hub of a trade in Romanian teenage girls destined for prostitution in Germany and France. While in Belgium, the investigation has been virtually at a standstill for months, it has been discovered in Lyon that there was a fixed route for these girls and that they usually stayed overnight 'at places in Liege or Charleroi'. Charleroi? That's where Dutroux lived, right? `Duterme transferred the file to another team of investigators, headed by his deputy, Jean-Luc Decker,' says one of the investigators. `Decker decided after two weeks that LV was not worth further investigation.' LV may not only light a candle for Duterme and Decker. He may also do so for Attorney General Eliane Liekendaal of the Court of Cassation. Just before she removes Jean-Marc Connerotte from the Dutroux case with her

spaghetti judgment, the magistrate has agreed to carry out Operation Raisin. This will consist of carrying out eight searches at LV, at his business, at the homes of two men who kidnapped girls for him in 1996, and at the garage where he bought his car and which had already attracted attention in the Dutroux case.*25 After Connerotte's departure, the house searches did not materialise.

NOTES:

1. Reconstruction was based on newspaper clippings in La Nouvelle Gazette from May 1989 to May 1991.
2. Interview with André Meunier, the 7th of January, 1998.
3. The attestation is only included in a judicial file eight years after the facts, namely the 139/96 file of Neufchâteau: Brussels BOB, 7th of November 1996, PV 116.603.
4. The Charleroi Public Prosecutor's Office has two informative investigations concerning the death of Pascal Meunier under the reference numbers CH 32.07.11984/89 and CH 30.43.3314/89. Since at no time is the possibility of a murder taken into account, ongoing investigations against the Meunier family.
5. Reconstruction was based on newspaper clippings in La Nouvelle Gazette and other local newspapers.
6. Bouchat acted for Michèle Martin in the past. Like some of his confreres, in August 1996, he invoked family reasons for not acceding to the request.
7. Letter from Michel Bouchat to the Meunier family, the 25th of January 1990.
8. Interrogation, GP Dinant, 26 August 1996, pv 1.103.
9. BOB Brussels, the 24th of August 1996, pv 112.653.
10. Interrogation of Henri Eloy, BOB Brussels police, the 8th of September 1996, pv 113.223.
11. Interrogation of G., BOB Brussels, 8 and 28 September 1996, official reports 113.127 and 114.553.
12. BOB Brussels, the 13th of September 1996, pv 113.660.
13. It later emerged that the gendarme drives a car belonging to L.V. 's company and works for it. At night,

- he delivers goods to bars and restaurants supplied by L.V. BOB Brussels, the 25th of February, 1997, pv 150,343.
14. Fax Interpol France, BOB Brussels, the 17th of October 1996, PV 114.698.
 15. During one of the interrogations in 1983, the victim stated that L.V. had threatened to use the mayor of a large Walloon city to isolate her and her family socially.
 16. Mustapha Iziz and Paolo Di Giorgio are both sentenced to 5 years effectively. However, they beat a timely retreat and may currently be residing abroad.
 17. Interrogation of Geneviève C., BOB Brussels, 17 April 1997, PV 151.149.
 18. Interrogation Florence R., BOB Brussels, the 17th of April 1997, report 150.831.
 19. Interrogation, BOB Brussels, the 21st of March 1997, report 150.802.
 20. The periods in question were from the 16th of December 1986 to the 7th of January 1987 and from the 27th of January to the 13th of February 1987. BOB Brussels, the 14th of December 1996, PV 118.480.
 21. Interview with Daniel Dejasse, the 15th of July 1998.
 22. BOB Brussels, the 23rd of December 1996, PV 118.218.
 23. André Mestnier showed the authors the photographs of the corpse and is willing to show his pictures to all those who could ever be interested in the murder of his son.
 24. Letter from examining magistrate Langlois to Major Guissard (gendarmerie Neufchâteau) and Commander Dutorme (BOB Brussels), July 11, 1997.
 25. Five days after the Spaghetti Judgment, a new request for search mandated is sent to the new investigating judge Langlois. The list of eight targets at that time extended to eleven. BOB Brussels, the 25th of October 1996, PV 116.122

5. 'Brussels, 51 murders since 1991 and 3,000 disappearances, including 1,500 minors.'

Brussels Prosecutor's Office estimate, April 1997

Even then, the flaky house facades gave passers-by the impression of an irreversible process of decay. In just over fifteen years, all pork had been banned from butcher shops and beer from local pubs. French- or Dutch-language inscriptions had been replaced with Arabic ones. After a lengthy vacancy, an industrial building along the Helmetsesteenweg had become a mosque. Not that there were no more Belgians living in the neighbourhood. They had grown older and were less visible in the street scene. The Schaerbeek neighbourhood had not become a ghetto. Few communities in Brussels have lived together so harmoniously. Turkish and Moroccan migrants who settled here saw this as a small step up the social ladder.

The town fair was still held at Van Ysendyck Square at the time. The "square" was the deceptive word for a vacant lot near the intersection of Maréchal Fochlaan and Helmetsesteenweg. It was Wednesday afternoon when many migrant children were on their way to Arabic class. They had rushed their lunches, so they had some extra time to marvel at all the attractions on Van Ysendyck Square. So did Hanim and Atilla. The class began at two o'clock. Atilla's older brother came to pick him up. Hanim, ten years old, stayed a while. Later, she would babysit for her sister Nuran, who probably wouldn't mind if she arrived half an hour later.

A loud scream. Two black men. A third man, white, he thought, in a car. A white van was parked near the bumper car stall. It was a little after two o'clock. This is what Cevik Suayip, eight years old, could recall. He was too short to see over the heads of adults. Detectives from the Brussels Judiciary would later show him dozens of images of cars. Cevik would point to a Ford Transit: 'It was that kind of car.'

Nuran kept waiting until four o'clock. Then she asked the neighbour to watch over her children and got on the tram. Although Hanim was always punctual, she did not show up this time. Nuran didn't dwell on it any further. Their father, Ali Mazibas, stopped by at five o'clock for a cup of tea. Unlike his eldest daughter, he immediately suspected that something must have happened. 'When I came home, the whole place was in turmoil', Nuran reconstructs the fateful day. I felt terribly guilty. I shouldn't have resigned myself to Hanim's staying

away.' Friends and family were mobilised. Ali himself led the searches. 'For twenty-eight days, we searched,' he says. 'Everywhere. We combed all of Brussels - all the parks, squares and streets.'*1 Ali never held a driver's license. He goes everywhere on foot. Many years later, he still carries a large framed colour photograph of his Hanim everywhere he goes. Thousands of times already, he has taken the portrait of his little daughter out of the now-crumpled plastic bag. The frame is broken in several places. Ali will continue to search until his death. To search for the perpetrators, and especially for the reason behind her disappearance.

Like many Turkish migrant families in Brussels, the Mazibas family originated from the town of Emirdag. The four eldest children were born there, and the three others were born in Belgium after they arrived in 1971. Hanim Ayse Mazibas came into the world on 16 June 1977. She is the youngest child, daddy's little girl. Ali started working as a metal worker at the Nestor Martin factory in 1973 and remained there until 1982, when he was put on permanent disability leave with a lung disease. Ali never really mastered French. Nuran is more fluent. 'Yes, I do now,' she sighs. 'I was only twenty-four when the events took place. I didn't dare to stand up for myself yet. We underwent the events. That night, we went to report my sister's disappearance. My father accosted a policeman. He shouted that they had to close the airport in Zaventem. That was the atmosphere then. The police informed us that we had to look for ourselves. They said we'll start looking if she's not back by Monday.'

The family is told from the onset that this is probably "a family matter." 'A cousin of my mother had broken up with her fiancé, a Turkish boy from Liege,' Nuran explains. 'The two families were in dispute. But, we asked, what did Hanim have to do with that situation? She was just a little girl. Moreover, it was the boy who renounced the marriage. There was some quarrel, yes, but never in the traditions of our people was a dispute ever settled in this manner. In those days, we were still polite. We had no idea how a judicial investigation was supposed to work. That only became more or less clear to us after the Loubna case. Everyone was outraged that no neighbourhood investigation had been carried out after her disappearance. Do you think they did that at our place? My father could not

comprehend why the investigators stayed so indifferent. He wanted action immediately. "Give me one name, and I'll take care of it myself," he said. He could not understand how anyone could have done something like this and how they denied him the right to take action himself. They thought he was a crazy old man.'

A few days after the kidnapping, Ali places an ad in the newspaper. He offers a reward of 100,000 francs for the golden tip. On 29 March 1988, he receives a letter from an unknown person claiming to have kidnapped Hanim. If he wants his daughter back, Ali has to deposit a ransom of 1 million Belgian francs on 3 April at 11 p.m. in Brussels' Rue Neuve. Ali informs the Judiciary Police, who decide to set up a trap. 'The policemen showed me their firearms,' Ali recalls. 'I was afraid but prepared to do anything for Hanim. I was supposed to hand over a plastic bag full of old newspapers. The police would then arrest the man.' The plan worked. Only the so-called kidnapper is a destitute Ghanaian asylum seeker called Manasah Opokü. He says he was alerted by a friend to an easy way to earn a million. On 5 April 1988, two days after the shady operation in the Nieuwstraat, a boatman on the Brussels-Willebroek canal near the Monnoyer quay saw something floating on the surface. 'A policeman brought us a shoe and a necklace,' recalls Nuran. 'Then we knew there was no more hope.'

The medical examiners informed the family that Hanim was thrown into the water with two concrete blocks. One was tied around her feet with a cable, the other around her neck. The discovery came by accident. The propeller of a ship brought the body to the surface. According to the initial findings of the coroners, Hanim was killed first, and her body had been in the canal for at least eight days. According to the official autopsy report, the girl's corpse could have been in the water for up to three weeks, meaning she was probably killed shortly after her disappearance. No traces of sexual abuse were detected. Hanim always remained a virgin. 'We would like to believe that,' says Nuran. 'But after everything we have seen happen in this investigation, we have also become sceptical about this kind of info.'

In mid-April, Ali Mazibas boarded a plane at Brussels International. The baggage compartment holds a small coffin. The family has invested so much money in the search for Hanim that there is no longer enough money to allow the mother, sisters, and brothers to journey to Turkey. Ali grieves alone at the Emirdag cemetery.

Between a dozen or so different minor issues, the council of the Court of First Instance in Brussels decided on 22 October 1990 to dismiss all suspects in the dossier with number 38.11.148/88 and to close the entire case without consequence. This decision was based on a petition submitted on 8 October 1990 by Substitute De Codt after he had taken note of a report by examining magistrate De Ruyver. The efficiency with which the Brussels public prosecutor can vertically classify child murders is sometimes in sharp contrast to the attempts to solve them - or even to inform the family.*2 Shortly after the disappearance of Hanim Ayse Mazibas, De Ruyver arrested a certain Joseph DR in addition to Opokü. A boy identified him as a strange man who spoke to Hanim at the fair. There is a snippet in Cevik's testimony that ties in with this. No evidence was ever found, and the police released DR two days later. At the beginning of 1997, the ambience within the Neufchâteau cell of the Brussels BOB was despondent. Théo Vandijck, the appointed interrogator of Nathalie W, was taken away with a cerebral haemorrhage at the end of January. Others don't sleep at night because of the horrific nature of the X-witnesses' accounts. They are overworked and feel increasingly frustrated because the initial support of their superiors is perceptibly crumbling. X1, meanwhile, is unchained. On 27 December 1996, she spent a night punching recollections into her computer and faxed the result to investigator Patriek De Baets. She proposed this method to speed up the transfer of information. She sent her first fax on 17 December and the second on Christmas Eve. This is the third fax:

'Out of adoration for my children, although you can't rescue them anymore, mean the most to me. Cheyenne was born in February 1979 and murdered in the factory 2.5 years later. Elijah was born in August 1982 and murdered shortly after birth at my grandmother's house. Tiu was born on the 3rd of September 1983 and murdered in the riding school in

February 1984. Nanook was born on 16 June 1984 and killed at my grandmother's house immediately after birth.

- Bieleke: a little boy who was about three years old. He was the first child I saw killed. I was also three at the time, and he was from West Flanders but not from Knokke. He had short hair, short pants and was wearing a striped sweater. - Ildiko: Hungarian girl, abused in my grandmother's villa from the early seventies until 1976, and then she suddenly disappeared. I think she was murdered, too. - Katrine: girl from the coastal region. Blonde braids and freckles. She was murdered, I think, around 1977 or '78, during a hunting party. - Els: I don't know where she came from. She was about ten and was killed in 1973-'76. - Olivier: French-speaking, was a foster child. The family often stayed at the villa where he was abused, also by his foster father. He died in the late 1970s. I think he was fourteen or fifteen at the time. - Jan: spoke in a Bruges accent, was about sixteen when he was murdered in a movie during the early eighties. - Lieve spoke in a Knokke accent and was around sixteen when she was killed. I was about six at the time. - Marie-Christine (Mieke): From Antwerp, killed in the early eighties. She was about fifteen. - Joëlle: French-speaking girl, murdered between 1976 and '79. - Pamela was about two years old, I think even Marie-Christine's child. She was killed in 1982 or '83. - Cathérine: murdered in 1980, spoke both French and Dutch. She was about twelve, I think. - Sarah, Maude, Tom: killed during hunting parties. I have no idea where they were from, only that it was before 1980. - Michèlle was about eight years old and Dutch-speaking. But she spoke standard Dutch*3, so I don't know what region she was from. (...) - Veerle: between 1980 and '84, from East Flanders. But didn't speak with a Ghent accent or anything like that. - Cristel: about sixteen years old, in '83, I think. An Antwerp accent, or so. (killed) in a movie. - Cathérine: French, fourteen or so, between 1980 and '84. - Véronique (Véro): French and broken Dutch, in 1979. (...) - Luc: Antwerp accent, movie (1982?). He was thirteen or fourteen years old at the time. - Paulke: French-speaking, four or five years old in the early 1980s. In a movie. - Valérie: bilingual, I think from the coastal region, the early eighties. - Anja: about fourteen, somewhere from East Flanders, but with a country accent. - Thamara: came from the province of Antwerp and was eighteen when she committed suicide after they violently raped her. She was the daughter of a regular customer. I had known her since Knokke. - Kris: a boy of about ten who spoke in a West Flemish accent. In 1983, I

believe. They let him bleed to death. - Sonja: Dutch. She was, I think, sixteen in 1980. - Lindsey: Two years in a movie, and also in 1983. - Anouk, Belinda, Murielle, Nicole: regular girls from Knokke, disappeared one after the other in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Murielle and Nicole spoke French and broken Dutch. The rest spoke Dutch. I think Nicole was from Ghent. - Nefryé: Turkish girl (killed in a) hunt. I think in '82 or so. - Marie-Thérèse (Mieke): March or April 1984, I think. In Knokke. - Clo and Véronique and Christine. - Still alive? - Soetekin, Leila, Chantal, Natanja, Thierry, Sammy, Nathalie, Marleen (from Oostakker). I roughly calculated that I saw another 30 or so children disappear, but I have forgotten or never knew their names. It's a big number, and I'm sorry I don't remember more of them. But surely there were children like Cheyenne and Tiu, for example, children who never officially existed. Besides Clo, I also helped about six others give birth. The victims who survived, like Chantal, did not witness any murders, as far as I know. And the victims who did experience something and survived have either killed themselves or are so addicted or mentally disturbed that I have little hope for witnesses with the same story to tell. Maybe I'm wrong; I hope so... In any case, I know several young people who committed suicide or overdosed. Greetings, Ochi.*4

If X1 was already causing disagreement among the investigators at the end of December, this fax only worsens matters. De Baets asked First Sergeant Aimé Bille to check whether there were any lists in Belgium of missing children, unsolved child murders and unidentified child corpses. Bille turns to the national register.*5 The answer he receives the next day is sobering, disheartening and frightening: 44,927. That is the total number of minors registered as deceased since the 1st of January 1970, when the national register began counting. A breakdown according to the causes of death does not appear to be part of the statistical possibilities.*6 To know which individuals were murdered or went missing, the investigators can only check with the various public prosecutors' offices. Only there can the correct information come from, and only there can the authorisation to release it be given if needed.

On 13 February 1997, Bille wrote to all 27 public prosecutors' offices in the country with the simple question of providing the number of unsolved murders of (or disappearances of) people

younger than thirty. The BOB will pay dearly for this. The Dutroux storm is far from subsiding, and the reactions that Bille is garnering say a lot about the envy that Bourlet, Connerotte and Verwilghen have stirred up within the judiciary. Several public prosecutors are making a big deal out of the procedural error of a humble First Sergeant daring to reach out to them directly. In addition, the question asked by the BOB explicitly referred to unsolved criminal acts. At the beginning of 1997, the climate was not conducive for many magistrates to provide Neufchâteau with information on these matters. Throughout the country, the visages of Benoît Dejemeppe and Martine Doutrève in the Verwilghen Commission have a paralysing effect on public prosecutors. The public prosecutor of Kortrijk responds with a short letter in which he announces that he can only deal with this request if it comes from examining magistrate Langlois himself. Eight public prosecutors will leave the letter unanswered: Antwerp, Mechelen, Turnhout, Tongeren, Liege, Leuven, Charleroi and Namur. This is the set of responses Bille received at the end of April 1997:

Eupen: not a single case since 1988 (formerly Verviers) - Verviers: not a single case since 1985 - Arlon: 1 murder in 1993 - Huy: 43 'diverse' murders - Tournai: 7 murders - Ypres: no reports - Oudenaarde: two murders - Hasselt: no reports - Marche-en-Famenne: 4 murders - Mons: 8 murders and 34 disappearances since 1985 Nivelles: 68 murders since 1990 and 210 disappearances, 3 of them unsolved - Ghent: 2 murders and 3 disappearances of minors - Veurne: 'research is still in progress.' - Bruges: four murders since 1970 and 11 disappearances since 1984 - Dendermonde: 10 murders and 1 disappearance - Brussels: 51 murders since 1991 and 3,000 disappearances, including 1,300 minors.*7

Just how broad the magistrates' capacity for interpretation can be is demonstrated by the results for Brussels. After justice minister Stefaan De Clerck ordered the country's public prosecutors to appoint "disappearance magistrates" and create special procedures to manage future disappearances, the capital's public prosecutor's office protested. The plan is said to be 'unrealistic.' At some point, the Brussels public prosecutor will, in an act of passive protest - 'we have too few resources'- reopen dozens of old dossiers and virtually halt a series of regular daily activities. By way of demonstration, the

public prosecutor's office evidently is interested in interpreting a question about disappeared persons as verbatim as possible.*8 Nevertheless, this fact -1,300 missing children in Brussels alone- suddenly makes X1's fax seem less outlandish.

Adjutant De Baets quickly realises that the official statistics will not make him any wiser, so he brings the problem to the attention of Magistrate Michel Bourlet. Many journalists hold the magistrate in high esteem, and he is aware of this. When they contact him, he asks parenthetically whether they have databases at their editorial offices to search for reports - preferably pictures too- about missing or murdered children in the 1970s and 1980s. Journalist Anne de Graaf spends entire nights looking through old issues of Het Nieuwsblad. Others do that too. A small selection of their search results is handed over to De Baets, who confronts X1 with it on 2 February 1997. X1 reacts as she always does to photographs: sulking, reluctant, doubtful. There are ten photocopies of pictures spread out in front of her. They show the smiling faces of girls. At one point, she rests her fingers on the miniature black-and-white portrait of a blonde girl with a long name: Naatje van Zwaren de Zwarenstein.

Naatje was fourteen when she vanished on the 12th of March 1976. In the days before her disappearance, she was often absent from school. Like Christine Van Hees, she rode horseback in a riding school in the Ter Kamerenbos. Naatje, who grew up in a family as wealthy as her name suggests, usually went there by cab and always had a lot of money in her pocket. There, she acquainted adults about whom the wildest stories were circulating. The riding school was rumoured to have ties to a prostitution milieu that provided services to some foreign embassies in Brussels. Naatje was said to have fallen in love with her mentor, who had a somewhat fraught judicial past. His circle of friends included wealthy Zairians, some of whom were pimps. Three days before Naatje van Zwaren de Zwarenstein was last seen, a girl of her age disappeared in similar circumstances elsewhere in Brussels. Her name was Paulette N, and according to some witnesses, she was a friend of Naatje. Paulette N. had already run away from home on 9 March 1976 and had been found afterwards with the son of the Zairean consul in Antwerp. According to their friends, Naatje and Paulette belonged to a group of girls

who regularly participated in sex parties, voluntarily or involuntarily.

One of those girls, Joelle J., declared to the judicial authorities that on 12 March 1976, the day before Naatje's disappearance, they would leave for the Netherlands in a group. She claimed she was picked up by a Zairean and taken to the riding school against her will, where she eventually managed to escape. She said this had happened to her before, but they had drugged her on that occasion. Joelle J affirmed the network operated in the utmost secrecy. Whoever spoke up about it risked being murdered or mercilessly beaten up, as her classmate Christine C. had been. Joelle J. talked to her mother about compulsory abortions and sex parties where children were cut to pieces. Joelle J. claims Naatje had a nickname in that environment that was supposed to hide her true identity: Sandra. Marie V, then sixteen years old, confirmed that story: 'I was obliged to participate in sex parties in the Red Cloister and the Pacific residence. Paulette and Sandra were also present there. We were beaten.' Mireille DB, also sixteen, tells similar stories and says she had to have an abortion in London.

The least one can say is that the old dossier 181/76 of the Brussels investigating judge Lyna bears similarities to the case that has preoccupied the antenna-Neufchâteau for months. In Naatje's bedroom, the investigators found writings which showed that she had progressive ideas about sexuality for a child of fourteen. In the old dossier, a place name even turns up that by now sounds familiar: Faulx-les-Tombes. It is the place where Paulette N declared at the beginning of 1976 that she wanted to live there.*9

On 7 April 1976, Naatje van Zwaren de Zwarensstein turned up again, alive and kicking and in perfect health. The whole affair collapsed like a pudding - all ends well. Naatje called her father from Amsterdam and said she wanted to return home. From the sparse account, we recall that she had fallen in love with her mentor in the riding school, had followed him to Amsterdam by hitchhiking, and had a very pleasant stay there. A medical examination was performed to claim that Naatje had gone to Amsterdam as a virgin and returned as a virgin. When, in early 1998, the X1-investigations briefly put the country into an uproar, the now retired examining magistrate Lyna will tell

in front of the cameras of RTBf a tasty story about the time there had been rumours of a case of trafficking in white enslaved people. Still, in the end, everything was traced back to an adolescent who had run away from home.*10

Immediately after returning, Naatje and her family emigrated to the United States. Naatje van Zwaren de Zwareinstein died there in 1980. She was eighteen—a traffic accident.

X1 was seven years old when Naatje disappeared. She was never questioned about the circumstances in which she allegedly saw Naatje. Several media outlets postulated in January 1998 that X1 stated that she 'saw Naatje die during a sex party'. This is not true. None of the official reports drawn up after the photo confrontation is anything of that nature mentioned.*11 To the authors of this book, X1 merely stated she was a girl I think I saw once. Did Naatje van Zwaren de Zwareinstein end up in the same milieu as Regina Louf? No one looked into this theory. The detectives of the Neufchâteau cell consider the old dossier, which goes back to 1979 anyway, as less of a priority and will never have the opportunity to verify the testimonies of the time.

X1 points out two other photos that day. One is that of Katrien De Cuyper, who disappeared in Brasschaat at the end of 1991. She was fourteen at the time. Her body was found six months later in the Antwerp harbour district. The photo on which X1 rested her finger next was that of Hanim Ayse Mazibas.*12 From that moment on, De Baets and his colleagues found themselves in the middle of two ongoing legal investigations. In the Antwerp public prosecutor's office, investigating judge Jordens has never ceased investigating the murder of Katrien De Cuyper. In Brussels, the old dossier 38.11.148/88 on the murder of the Turkish girl has recently been dusted off and is being looked at. The storm of criticism that the Brussels public prosecutor's office received following the Loubna affair has led to a reanalysis of several old files on child murders and disappearances.*13

However, substitute Philippe Meire has taken up the case with a different motivation. From his first reading of the old file, he noticed that this case was handled with possibly even more negligence than that of Loubna Benaïssa. Meire entrusted two detectives of the Brussels Judicial Police with a new set of

investigative tasks. Meire is not the type of investigative leader who hits the roof when another police department threatens to come up with a new line of inquiry. When Commander Duterme of the Neufchâteau branch brings to his attention that the autopsy showed the victim to be a virgin, he replies: 'And since when is that the only way to abuse a child?' Within the cell, on 19 February, adjutant Christian Pirard was entrusted by substitute Meire, clearly against Duterme's wishes, with an analysis of the Mazibas dossier.

Joseph D.R. is 53 years old at the time of the facts, works at a tax consultancy in Schaerbeek, has two children, and divorced three months earlier. His wife has custody of the children; Joseph does not exercise his visitation rights. He was seen on 9 March 1988 at the fair on the Van Ysendyckplein in Schaerbeek by the eleven-year-old Maurizio R. When the Judiciary Police interrogated the little Maurizio in 1988, he provided some details from which it could seem that DR was out to lure not only Hanim but also himself. DR bought ice cream for them and treated her to rides on the auto scooters, says Maurizio.

On 23 March 1988, the Brussels Judiciary Police rang the doorbell of Joseph DR's apartment in Jette. He refuses to open the door, but the police officers keep watch. After an hour, he leaves his apartment and tries to drive away with his Lada. The police intercepted him and searched his home. Joseph DR is officially domiciled at Rue Anatole France 50 in Schaerbeek. That is near the place where Hanim disappeared. In its inscrutable wisdom, the Judiciary Police does not conduct a house search there. The investigators are satisfied with DR's explanation when he says he has not lived there for some time and could have been seen on the Van Ysendyckplein that Wednesday. He had his children with him that day and had to go to his bank, a branch of the Bank Brussel Lambert on the Helmetsesteenweg 210, near the Van Ysendyckplein.*14 The Judiciary Police failed to check in 1988 whether a financial transaction was carried out on 9 March 1988 on account of DR. If he has been in the bank, it is hard to avoid the possibility that he paid, deposited or received something there - even if it was only account statements. Pirard does what the police failed to do in '88. The result is negative according to the computer archive of the BBL; not a single banking

transaction in the name of Joseph DR was registered that day.*15

In 1988, another contradiction was noticed in Joseph DR's statements about his time spent on 9 March 1988. Initially, he flatly denies having been at the fair on Van Ysendyck Square that day. Only after a confrontation with little Maurizio R. in the offices of the Judiciary Police on 23 March 1988, he came up with the bank visit story. He says he had his children with him that day, and before he knew it, they had run out into the square to watch the fair. Joseph DR's ex-wife formally denies this. The children were with her that day. She undergoes no further questioning save the one telephone conversation. The children themselves are also not questioned. Had this happened, investigating judge De Ruyver might not have been so quick to lift the arrest warrant issued against DR two days earlier.*16

De Ruyver also failed to find out whose Lada DR had tried to flee with. The Lada, Pirard's research shows, is registered in the name of Fiduciary Western Fiscal Center, Joseph DR's employer, back in 1988. This is not unusual, but the waters get murkier when one looks closer at the firm. In 1988 it shared office space with another company. It was the Omniplex company whose business was transporting and storing wood. And where can we find the Omniplex warehouse? At the Monnoyerkaai number 11. That is the location where the corpse of Hanim Ayse Mazibas was pulled out of the water on 5 April 1988.*17

When investigators retook an interest in Joseph DR in early 1997, there was no trace of him in all of Belgium. According to the latest reports, he has moved to France, but his name does not appear in any register there. There may be an innocent reason for that, which can also be said of all the other coincidences that plead against DR *18. `But we would have preferred to have had that certainty in 1988', says Nuran Mazibas. `It is good that people are starting to take an interest in our case again, but we don't feel that much has changed. We had to learn about the existence of witness X1 from journalists. Even today, investigators refuse to follow up on the most evident traces. After Hanim's disappearance, we were approached by a stranger who lived on our street. The man

came by now and then to ask questions about our family and Hanim... For two years, he constantly harassed us. I recently recognised the man in a photo at the Judiciary Police. He turned out to be a notorious paedophile. He, too, has since left the country. I am not saying he is the culprit; I am just noting that the justice system is not doing its job. The last time I went to see the investigators, they suddenly started talking again about a settlement within the family. I was seething with rage.

Ali Mazibas is stuck with a different story. He is convinced that a week before the disappearance of his youngest daughter, he was arguing at a market with none other than Patrick Derochette. 'I'm sure it was him,' says Ali. 'When I saw him on television, I immediately felt I recognised him. He was the man who stood in a market in Schaerbeek handing out toys to girls. I was on my way to the mosque and saw him. I remember getting angry because he only gave toys to the girls; the boys got nothing. He was standing there beside a small van. But yes, the investigators laughed at me. They took me for an old fool.'

The first interrogation of Regina Louf about the murder of Hanim Ayse Mazibas is entirely in line with how the dossier 38.11.148/88 was managed at the time and how all the subsequent collateral investigations of Neufchâteau fared. It was not until Sunday, 5 April 1998, fourteen months after the photo was taken, that X1 was questioned about it. By then, De Baets has long been off the team, the press had declared Regina Louf a fantasist and a liar, and Sergeant Danny De Pauw and First Sergeant Eddy Verhaeghen look at her with a mocking smile when she tells them that "that Turkish girl" was killed during a hunting party on a domain in the Ardennes. The two BOB officers show her twenty photographs of Turkish girls, including one of Hanim Ayse Mazibas that had not yet appeared in the press. Regina Louf points to the correct photo but learns shortly afterwards that her statements are deemed worthless.

NOTES:

1. Interviews with Ali and Nuran Mazibas, November and December 1997.

2. The order of the council chamber was delivered by bailiff's writ to the Mazibas family on 1 July 1992. Mother Fadine Eken had to pay 71 francs that day to learn that the public prosecutor's office decided almost two years ago that it no longer wanted to search for the murderer(s).
3. General Dutch.
4. Fax X1 to antenna-Neufchâteau, BOB Brussels, 27 December 1996, added to PV 119.244.
5. BOB Brussels, 9 January 1997, PV 100.127.
6. BOB Brussels, 10 January 1997, report 150,095.
7. BOB Brussels, 22 April 1997, PV 151.298.
8. The number of minors of the 1,300 that had disappeared since 1991 were found afterwards, prosecutor Dejemeppe could not find out. No statistics are kept on this query.
9. Synthesis of file 181/76 of the Brussels investigating judge Lyna, Brussels police force, 5 June 1997, PV 151.868. The data about (and from) Paulette N., Joëlle J. and Mireille D.B. are also discussed there.
10. Au Nom de la Loi (RTBf), 18 February 1998.
11. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, 2 February 1997, PV 150.069.
12. BOB Brussels, 2 February 1997, PV 150.067 and 150.068.
13. This would also lead to the arrest of the Hungarian Andras Pandya a few months later.
14. Synthesis of the old file 38.11.148/88, BOB Brussels, PV 151.278.
15. BOB Brussels, 4 June 1997, PV 152.096.
16. Synthesis of the old file 38.11.148/88, BOB Brussels, PV 151.278.
17. Findings based on the computer archive of the Craydon financial consultancy firm.
18. The main reason for Joseph D.R.'s release is that Maurizio R. suddenly declared on 24 March 1988 that he had not seen DR at the fair at all. It has never been made clear why the eleven-year-old completely changed his version of the facts within a 24-hour period.

6. *“I killed her.”*

Fax from X1 about Katrien De Cuyper, February 18th, 1997

Along a busy approach road to the centre of Antwerp that night in March '97, several members of the gendarmerie's Special Intervention Squadron (SIE) are prowling around parked cars. Their mission is super-secret. One of them has a suitcase with a tiny device in it. They must try to install it unnoticed under the hood of a grey Citroën CX. Tony V probably never knew that in 1997, he enjoyed the dubious honour of being shadowed for a month with the most sophisticated equipment the Belgian police force possessed. What was taped to his car that night was a special localisation system called a 'goniometer' in police jargon. It is a tiny transmitter that sends signals every time the vehicle moves, which the SIE receives via satellite, allowing it to geolocate the 'target' accurately to a few dozen meters. The device is usually only used in fighting the most severe crimes. Against the background of the significant 'disclosure' of X1 in the press a year later, it sounds incredible that such means were

used for her. Some twenty magistrates are aware of this intervention and continue to hope until today that no one will remind them of it.

The SIE already shadowed Tony V at the beginning of the investigation but in the old-fashioned way. Plainclothes officers followed him from nine in the morning until ten at night. The first shadow operation occurred between October 18 and 20, 1996, the day of the white march - which must have been about the worst chosen moment to catch a paedophile. The SIE itself determined the days of the operation, depending on the available manpower. A second shadow operation followed on October 30 and 31. Neither operation produced any noteworthy results except perhaps the knowledge that he had locked himself up in his apartment on the day of the white march.*1 The Neufchâteau cell raised the same question after the shadowing operation on Marc Dutroux as part of the secret Othello operation. Why did the police halt their stake-out at ten o'clock in the evening?

The goniometer would remain in Tony V's car for only a month. Bourlet did give the written order at the end of April to extend the satellite observation for two months, but by then, the SIE had already removed the device from the Citroën.*2 Captain Leveque of the SIE wants to know 'the specific motivation' for following this unknown Antwerp resident. He is apparently on the same wavelength as Commander Duterme, who expressed disapproval during a meeting on May 13th, 1997. It is one of the many moments in the X1 investigation when the top of the gendarmerie completely ignores the magistrates' orders.

Adjutant De Baets and Master Sergeant Hoskens believe there are good reasons to continue following Tony V. He was spotted no less than twenty-one times near four schools in April. In a memo written by De Baets to express his dissatisfaction with halting the operation, he explains: 'One of these schools is the one which De Cuyper Katrien attended until she was found murdered near the port of Antwerp. There are suspicions, and this via a statement of X1 (...), that the target would be one of the perpetrators of the murder of that girl. We have strong suspicions that (...) is a recruiter for several children and that, at the same time, he is the pimp of a number of other children. We should also not lose sight of the fact that the sister of the

murdered child, Katrien, still attends school in the same institute.*3

It won't accomplish anything. May and June are the months in which the X1 investigations are dismantled one by one through rereadings and procedural disputes. De Baets' memo, by the way, raises the eyebrows of many of his colleagues. He mentions, among other things, that Tony V recently had telephone contact with X1's mother and seems to assume that this could indicate that X1 is in mortal danger. De Baets also mentions in his note the murder of the Moroccan girl Loubna Benaïssa. At that time, everybody already knew that she was abducted and probably murdered by Patrick Derochette. Still, for De Baets, it is far from a foregone conclusion that there could be no connection with certain statements of X1.

'De Baets had become a real believer,' says a colleague. 'The situation had changed completely. In the beginning, Regina Louf was timid. When you saw her sitting there, you felt sorry for her. She didn't talk to anyone; she seemed frightened by everything she saw in our buildings. Then, in the spring of 1997, she came in with an attitude that was as if she had worked there. She went to chat with detectives; you could hear her laughing out loud. It was as if she saw herself as a kind of medium. It was in a manner of speaking: you ask, X1 delivers. There wasn't much left of the separation between interrogator and witness.'

The fact that De Baets no longer has the slightest doubt about X1's credibility and attaches value to every word spoken by her is due in part to the interrogation of February 1st, 1997. It was the first interrogation since December 15th. In the month and a half between, she had sent almost daily faxes in which she added more and more corrections to her earlier account of the murder of 'Kristien'. A new character -Mieke- had appeared. According to X1, she was there, too, that night at the old mushroom farm. Mieke was a girl of sixteen, the daughter of a Brussels prostitute. Her real name was Marie-Thérèse, X1 recalled. The girl had been murdered in Knokke at the end of 1984 in similar circumstances as 'Kristien'.*4.

Although the investigators were quite aware by now that it was practically impossible for Christine Van Hees to have been

present at a sex party in a riding school on the outskirts of Brussels in the evening or the afternoon of February 13, 1984, X1 maintained that the murder took place a few hours later. De Baets assumed a logical error in X1's traumatised memory. If you took away the chronology, everything was correct, he thought. Especially the motive for the murder of 'Kristien' - backed by the appearance of Mieke - was a significant piece of the puzzle, in his opinion. There was one fax, which he received on December 18th, 1996, in which X1 explains how panic ensued when it turned out that she had advised 'Kristien' to talk to her parents:

Mieke lashed out at me. She was really furious. And she was right, of course. If Kristien talked, they would also come at us. I was terrified of being locked up, and I still am. And I was so used to protecting the perpetrators; it was my responsibility that I could curse myself for that stupidity (...). 'You are crazy, Tinka, stupid! How can you be so stupid? If they read her diary, you'll never get out again, you know that? What are you going to do when the cops come and ask you what you've been teaching her? Play innocent? I was pretty impressed, Patriek. I felt like a traitor. And I got scared, too. If Mieke were to tell Nihoul or Tony that I had advised her to talk... I don't know who scared me more, Tony or the cops. But Mieke must have felt even more guilty and scared. Because Kristien was her friend, and maybe she felt guilty about having introduced her to the milieu, I don't know. And more afraid because, of course, they would have found Mieke sooner. Now I realise that Nihoul and the others must have been tipped off. They knew Kristien was becoming a danger, and she was writing things down. They called her a traitor there at the farm(...). Only now do I know why they went after me, made me watch them abuse and torture my little son, why they made me watch them kill him, why I had to clean up his blood and even put him in the garbage bag. I had to be punished for my betrayal (...). What did I do Patriek? I had them killed.'*5

During her fourteenth interrogation, X1 states that Nihoul subjected 'Kristien' to a barrage of questions that evening at

the old mushroom farm. 'He wanted to know if she had hidden something somewhere and had been there before with boys, how often and with how many.' According to X1, the old mushroom farm was certainly not a regular address. They chose it because Mieke had told them that 'Kristien' had been there before and because they wanted to force her to talk about what she might have hidden there.

X1 again describes the house next to the old mushroom farm and the cellar. The son of the former manager of the farm will later read this description. It will lead him to conclude that the person who described the farm must have been there. About 'Kristien', she can still recall that at a particular moment, Kristien mentioned that her period was late - which seems to correspond with testimony in the old dossier that Christine Van Hees had indeed been worried about this.*6 Each new detail confirms two contradictory convictions: the first is that the De Baets team had 'helped' her with some information. The other one is that she was at the mushroom farm that night in 1984. Meanwhile, yet another old murder has been added to the X1 dossier.

It was the period when the people in the northern part of Antwerp talked about little else. Katrien gave the last sign of life on the evening of December 17th, 1991. Around 9.30 pm, she called her parents. She had gone to see her friend, who lived in the Lange Lobroekstraat in Antwerp. She said she would take the last number 64 bus. One hour later, Katrien De Cuyper was spotted in the job café Les Routiers on the IJzerlaan. Customers saw her using the phone. It must have been 10:45 pm by then. The police failed to trace the phone call because the outdated switchboard did not allow retroactive tracing. Katrien De Cuyper was not seen alive again despite numerous searches in the first weeks of 1992. The police immediately suspected a correlation to the disappearances of Inge Breugelmans and Inès Van Muyldert, two teenage girls who had vanished without a trace in the same period.

On June 22nd, 1992, workers in the Antwerp harbour area near the warehouses of the "Katoennatie" company accidentally stumbled upon a woman's body during excavation work. The corpse could only be identified after several days as

that of Katrien De Cuyper because of the teeth. The autopsy showed that the girl must have been murdered soon after her disappearance. When the Dutch psychopath Ludo De Beukelaer was arrested a year later and almost spontaneously started pointing out the places where he had buried Inge Breugelmans and Inès Van Muyldert, it seemed like a matter of hours before he would also confess to the murder of Katrien De Cuyper. De Beukelaer, however, indicated that he was not the culprit and retained that conviction. Many traces were still being investigated, but dossier 263/92 of the Antwerp investigating judge Michel Jordens seemed to be heading for termination of the investigation a mere five years after the facts.

In the late afternoon of February 8th 1997, X1 reports for a fifteenth time to the Neufchâteau cell. It began a third series of marathon interrogations, with a new subject this time: Katrien De Cuyper. X1 situates the events after the birth of her son Yentl in mid-1991, which may be correct.

- I don't know if I can tell you much. Well, yes, but I know that Tony came to get me. He was accompanied by a guard dog, in a figurative sense (...).
- Was it the guard dog you described during another interrogation at the factory when the guard dog...
- No, no, no. It was something else.
- Ah.
- It was one of the two that was also there with Kristien.

Tony takes her to a restaurant in Ghent, and after eating something, they drive along the E17 highway to Antwerp. The destination of the drive is a residential area north of the city. Tony stops in front of a small castle with a tower. On the way, she says, he teases her with no uncertain remarks about the little family she now has. Don't you think you're too young for children? And then, I can do something about it; there is still time to change your mind. We can do anything you want.' It wasn't the first time he had knocked on her door unexpectedly. She felt that her marriage had made her a risk factor. Simply getting her out of the way, as happened with 'Clo', was no longer possible. So they decided that she should be made an accomplice.

She remembers that the little castle was almost invisible from the streetside. It had a slightly sloped driveway that curved slightly before the parking lot. A record of details follows: a small wall, a metal gate, a moat, a small bridge, a fairly large park, an old greenhouse, a kennel for hunting dogs, and an old orangery that was fifty to sixty meters away from the castle itself and accessible by a paved path leading along a kind of hedge trimmed in the shape of a rooster.

A man whose name she only remembers as Van Mol awaited them in the living room, along with the Flemish businessman Y, lawyer E, Michel Nihoul, Annie Bouty, politician O, and a few others. At first, she talked about 'seven individuals', but later, there were more. Nihoul immediately approached her and inquired with mock interest how her son was doing.

- Nihoul is aware that you have a son?
- He asks me: do you want to go back later? Well, those sorts of games. Do you want to go back? Yes, it's true. It's hard to explain how, uh... if you ask these questions, they're usually routine questions. I'm not sure... I don't know how to explain it. Anyway, I feel like I'm getting smaller.
- Hmhm.
- I know he's... that he takes my arm, puts it around him, and we took a little walk, and that he gosh... yes... He asked me if I knew why I was there. I shrug my shoulders in the way of pff, yes... Ah, he says, that's already the first mistake you make. And who knows what that means? Then he goes on, saying... You are here because, well, because you have to learn something. And we will explain it to you (...). Oh yes.
- Hmhm.
- Do you think you will understand when we teach you? Then I'll answer: yes, I think so. Ah, third mistake. You probably need to understand it better. Yes, it was that kind of conversation.
- Hmhm.
- Then came the conversation: yes, since we've known you for so long, so we'll give you something. And, uh, he said that if everything goes well and you cooperate a little, you can return home (...). Yes, he said, everything depends on you, of course, and whether you understand it or not remains to be seen. He said: I don't care; we can do it another way. Then he signals again to Tony: What's her phone number

again? Tony says the phone number off the top of his head. Yes, he says, you can always call home, hey. Yes, it was that kind of conversation; it came down to that.

Through the terrace, the whole company moves to another room. X1 calls it a kind of coach house.

- Ferdinand is there, and Catherine is there too.*7
- So, are there other people present? You give the names of someone, Ferdinand and Catherine (...). Is it possible to describe Ferdinand?
- He's pretty big, heavy, yes, fat. Uh, brown hair with a parting, a small moustache. I know him from the factory.
- How old is Ferdinand?
- Forty-six, I think.

About Ferdinand, X1 can still say that she situates him in the immediate vicinity of the former top minister she has talked about before, which may be true, as it turns out later.

- Can you describe Catherine better?
- She was quite young. Not so long hair, straight hair. She was not fat, not skinny either. Normal. Her hair smelled of shampoo, yet... It was like...
- When you look at Catherine very slowly, like a slow-motion picture... Is there anything that strikes you or... If you want to... (...). Have you seen this girl before?
- No, I didn't have contact with them anymore, you see.
- Was it the first time you saw this girl?
- Yes, it was.
- Now, if you draw from your feelings, can you describe the state of that girl?
- Frightened, withdrawn, terribly withdrawn. She cries a little, but not really. Not fully.
- How old do you think this girl was?
- She's still young. She was, uh... pff, I don't remember. About twelve years old, something like that.
- She must have been about twelve?
- Yeah, something like that.*8

To know if X1 indeed witnessed the murder of Katrien De Cuyper, the interrogation of February 8th offers little

guidance. Twelve years old was not the age of Katrien De Cuyper on the day of her disappearance. She was already fifteen and measured 1.70 metres. X1 says little more and wants to go home. De Baets and De Pauw let her.

On February 13th, the investigators meet with their colleagues in Antwerp who have been working on the case for five years. When they hear the outline of the testimony, they react enthusiastically. 'Some details from her description of that girl are absolutely correct,' says the Antwerp Judicial Police commissioner Hugo Cillis. He will support the X1-trail in the Antwerp investigation in the following weeks. His colleague, Luc Verreth of the BOB of Brasschaat, is more sceptical. Investigating Judge Jordens, on the other hand, reacts with delight. His first wife, a teacher, still knew Katrien De Cuyper personally. 'We have always guarded against processes of intention about Regina Louf, even after the conclusion of this track,' says one of the Antwerp detectives later. 'In the beginning, we believed in this testimony. We were not ashamed of it either. There were elements in it that were inexplicable to us unless she had been there. There are still unanswered questions today, but you have those with any unsolved murder.'

De Baets and De Pauw feel that X1 once again wants to hide something. The way she stopped the interrogation so suddenly, without any apparent reason, took them by surprise. It was only eight o'clock in the evening. De Baets speculated that in the coming days, she would clarify a few things by fax. Faxes arrive - the first one on February 11th, eight pages long. X1 is in an emotional mood and signs off with 'I.' She describes pretty much her entire life and explains some of her alter personas. On February 12th follows another fax, with what later turns out to be a rather impressive character sketch of 'Mijnheer Pede', alias Jean-Paul Raemaekers. Not a word about 'Catherine'.

On Saturday, February 15th, X1 is interrogated for the sixteenth time. Cillis and Verreth participate as spectators.

- Can you elaborate on what happened next?
- Pff... Uh... Gee... (long silence). Pff... she, pff... Uh, gee... I had to sit down next to her on the bed. And then I took a few steps back. I didn't want to... Yes, Tony said I was obliged. I

said it was impossible.... she had, uh... she'd started crying... I said I should, um... Tony said I had to have sex with her. I said no, no... I can't. I asked him why he didn't stop asking that. Why don't you stop, Tony, please? Why don't you stop? And, uh... he picked up the phone. There was a phone, a phone without a wire. He plugged it in and started with zero; he said it loudly. And then nine, he said, you do what I tell you. Do what I say; otherwise, I'll call him. I said no... He said: when I get to the last number, you no longer have a choice...

The interrogation proceeds for a while as a monologue. X1 tells how she lies in bed next to 'Catherine' and advises her to be as quiet as possible. Tony comes and sits next to them and tells her that she made the right choice. 'Then he said, you tell us when to do what; you have ten minutes to decide what happens next. X1 continues for a while, then calls out, 'Stop!' Only after an hour break - the interrogation had just begun - does she want to continue talking. The phone remains a constant threat. X1 says that she had to assist with the abuse of 'Catherine'. The investigators infer from X1's testimony that this girl, too, foolishly came into contact with the wrong people and became embroiled in a deadly game of threats and obligations.

- Would that girl have been there already, in that place?
- I don't know; I don't know.
- In your opinion, was she afraid of those people, or did she know some of them?
- She was afraid of the same people I was.
- But of the people there... Do you think she knew anybody?
- Yes, I say... she had the same fear. How should I put it, gosh, of Bouty, E, Nihoul... She reacted the same way to that. In my opinion, she knew the reality of her fears. She should have known why she was afraid. Do you understand?
- Okay, did you get the impression you had seen her before?
- She didn't give any names, but... It's the details, hey, the things she reacted to. For example, Bouty always tended to take you by the neck. She hadn't even lifted her hand, or Catherine flinched. You know, she was already pulling away. You have to learn things, or else you won't do them. Yeah... I mean... you only act like this when you know that...

- Where are you going with this?

X1 has walked away from the table and sat on the windowsill, knees to chin. She no longer offers explanations. The answers now come as they did in the first questioning: briefly, not at all, or with nods. She never spoke to 'Catherine', she says. It happened during the period when she hoped that Tony would never show himself again. X1 mentions an important date to her: June 5th, 1995. That was the last time she saw Tony. After that, she lived in suspense, like when she thought it was the last time, fearing that he would suddenly reappear in her life. After a break, it is now past ten, and the interrogation resumes.

- The people in that janitor's house, can you give us their names?
- One more time? Oh, pff... I thought the recording was for that sort of thing, lest I have to provide them a thousand times.
- Could you give us their names?
- E., Bouty, Nihoul, Tony, another one, a lawyer, the guy who apparently belonged to that castle, another one, Ferdinand... Do I have them all now? I don't know.
- Hmhm.
- I've lost the pedals, pff... Can I list them, even if I don't know their names?
- Give those names you know.
- I said that, didn't I?
- No, in your previous statement, you spoke of a Dewolf.
- Ah, yes, it's true. I'm sorry.
- Is that right?
- Yes.
- How did you know his name was Dewolf?
- Because I heard his name, of course (...).
- And what happens to Catherine in the end?
- (looks at the floor) I can't say.
- First, you said that...
- I can't.
- ... That Catherine is stretched out on the bed, on her stomach. What did you say?
- I can't; I can't. I can't do it, not yet.*9

At five minutes to eleven, the interrogation is over. X1 suddenly looks like a wreck, does not want to see the detectives anymore and only talks to the psychologist who followed the interrogation from a distance. De Baets again expects more salvation from the fax machine. He is right.

Hai Pat,

Saturday, I was not particularly talkative, hey? I couldn't because the pain was so bad I could hardly bear it. It hurts so much, Pat, especially because I also see the images. It's a story for you, but I'm experiencing everything all over again. And that's not even the hardest part. You see, I relive something every night, but saying it out loud is terrible. When you hear yourself telling it, everything seems to happen again. Everything comes back: the pain, the fear, the sadness and the despair (...). It's that aggression that makes us do things we could never do. We aim this aggression at an innocent girl, damn it, because we can't attack the real perpetrators because they have the phone and my babies. I couldn't do it, Pat; I couldn't lose another child. 'Cot death is common enough,' Tony said (...). He yelled at me and chased me like a wild animal. With each press of the button, he shouted again: 'Come on, Gina, choose! Say it, say it now! And I kept shaking no. I didn't want to, Pat, I couldn't. I put my hands to my ears. I wouldn't hear him anymore because I could think about how to save them (...). He dialled the last number and shouted, 'Last chance, Gina, I'm counting to three. One two...' And I yelled back. I yelled, 'Yes, I'll do it, Tony, please stop, I'll do it!' I breathed in and out deeply to keep from crying a few times in a row until I managed to keep my sadness in check. He still kept his finger on the last key and looked at me. He wanted to hear it again, more convincingly now. So I took another deep breath and said quietly, 'I'll do it, Tony. I'll do anything you ask.' And then he nodded, disconnected the phone, and passed it to Nihoul, who put it back in the drawer. At that moment, all feelings slipped away. The chill was back. 'What should we do with her, Gina? You decide. We do what you say.' Tony unbuttoned his tie as he spoke to me, a gesture so familiar it hurt. That was the moment a realisation grew in my heart. The realisation was that they would always control

me. And with the realisation came a kind of resignation (...). There, at that moment, I gave up fighting and acted robotically. It sounded unbelievable, but then I understood how easy it was to take their side. Do you understand, Pat? How easy it is to give up fighting and your responsibility and humanity; more than that, I couldn't understand why I had been fighting for so long. It seemed so... banal. So pointless. At that very moment, I loved them. Do you understand that? I loved them because I now knew who I was, where I belonged, and what I was. The peace that giving up brought me was almost hypnotic. Therein lies a big piece of my guilt. For me, it's important that I can say that or write that. It is precisely because I felt the same as she did, the same attraction, the same abandonment, that it is so difficult for me to talk about Catherine. Having to say it during the hearings makes the guilt so great that I can't carry it. I want so badly to feel it again - the peace of giving up - so badly that I want to die (...). I was so angry that I let them do everything they ever did to me. I no longer saw Catherine; I saw myself. And I was angry with myself; I hated the child who was hurting and crying, that I made her do the nastiest things. I hit her as hard as I could, and it felt nice. I vented my aggression on her. I incited E to fight her, just like he had always done to me. I made fun of him for being a weakling because I didn't think he was living up to the part yet. He had hurt me so much as a child. He had hurt me with sharp objects until the blood ran from my little legs, and I only focused on that (...). Tony came and stood next to me, pushed my chin up and started kissing me. 'Who do you belong to,' he whispered. 'To you, Tony.' 'How do you want me to take you?' I stroked him. 'Take me any way you want, Tony.' 'You are my property, pussycat. You belong to me. You live by my grace; your Erwin lives by my grace; your children live by my grace. Do you understand that, girl? (...) I turned my face to the bed as Nihoul played with my breasts and looked at Catherine, and a deep, desperate pain flowed through my heart. 'I'm sorry,' I said to her soundlessly. Tears were running down her cheeks, and I don't know if she understood me, but it seemed so (...). Tony took me aside while Ferdinand sat down with Catherine on the bed. She was lying on her stomach, and he quietly stroked her back and hair. She was

scared, holding her little hands clenched against her mouth. She stretched one arm and said Tony's name, half crying and trembling, but he ignored her. He took my face in his hands and forced me to look at him. 'Let go, sweetheart, do it for me. Do it for your babies. I don't want to hurt your babies, but it's your choice. Do you hear that pussycat? It's your choice; you decide.' I shook my head. After all these years, I still tried to approach him as a human being and communicate with him. After all these fucking years... how the hell is it possible? I told him quietly that I couldn't do it. That I wanted to do everything for him, but not that. He listened intently as if it touched him, you know. As if he understood. Oh god, Patriek, I can't describe what that's like, the hope you feel (...). I killed her. I don't dare go back yet to see how. I do remember every second, but I am still blocking it out. Because, for the moment, I still want to die too. But I want to live until they are under lock and key. I want to know if I can make them stop. After that ... Erwin had a long talk with me, saying he would let me go if I had no other choice. But not before we at least tried again after the trial. If after a year after the trial, I still can't live with what happened, he won't stop me from dying. Only now do I know how much he loves me (...). Oochi.*10

What De Baets holds in his hands that day is effectively a handwritten confession to a murder. Strictly speaking, he has no choice but to take X1 into custody. De Baets immediately informs Bourlet. From his note, we can deduce that X1 disclosed even more during a telephone conversation after she sent the fax. De Baets writes that 'there were several murders' when she was already of age. This is the major difference with X1's previous testimonies. In December 1991, she was twenty-two years old and thus fully legally responsible for her actions.*11 Bourlet responds rather quickly, advising X1 to file a complaint for the assault on her children. According to Bourlet, it is possible to further interrogate X1 as a witness if the facts she talked about qualify as a 'ongoing crime'. A few weeks later, X1 effectively filed a complaint with the Brussels public prosecutor against Michel Nihoul, Tony V and businessman Y. As victims, she mentions the names of Eli, Yentl and Hannah Beeckman, the children she had before the

end of 1994. The complaint cites 'touching and pictures, not sexual abuse'. Of her two eldest children, nude pictures were taken and shown to her to oblige her to participate in sex parties.*12

Also, no one is eager to charge X1 at the Antwerp public prosecutor's office. The Antwerp detectives have started to delve more into X1's statements and relate them to several 'clouded areas' in their dossier. One of the mysteries for them remains the alleged second life that Katrien De Cuyper led in the months before her disappearance. Some friends have stated that the girl sometimes went out alone at night, but her parents formally denied this. As in the Van Hees file, there are stories about a mysterious circle of friends. There is also something bizarre about that last phone call from the café Les Routiers. Only a few years later, it turns out that on the top floor of this café is the mailbox address of a Dutch porno company.*13 A harmless company, Antwerp detectives will decide a year later. They seemingly do not know that the company's name later turns up in the personal diary of Robby Van der Plancken, the Belgian who is associated with the murder of his friend Gerrie Ulrich in the summer of 1998. This murder gives rise to the Zandvoort scandal in the Netherlands. In the apartment of a respectable citizen in a hitherto quiet coastal town, the police discover more than 50,000 computer images of the most gruesome forms of child abuse. Among Ulrich's CD-ROMs are forms to 'order' children - even babies, but it costs a little more. The conditions stipulate what the 'client' may do with the child and how far he may go... The Zandvoort file also contains transfer forms from which it appears that until shortly before his death, Ulrich regularly deposited money on the accounts of the porn business above café Les Routiers.*14 When in mid-1999, the Dutch police compiled two catalogues of 589 images found at Gerrie Ulrich's, mainly of young victims; they also include a pornographic photo of a girl who looks exactly like Katrien De Cuyper.*15

In the afternoon of Saturday, March 1st, 1997, X1 is picked up by her interrogators at her home in Wondelgem. Investigators of the Antwerp Judicial Police and the Brasschaat BOB accompany them. The intention is to show them the road she took with Tony V to reach the castle. X1 leads them to

'sGravenwezel, then briefly loses her way there. A police officer gives her a hint, and a little later, the convoy stops in front of a fairy-tale-like castle with a stately tower, a large moat and a well-cared-for estate around it.*16 'Here it was', says X1. The castle belongs to a certain Baron W and borders the domain of the famous Antwerp antique dealer Axel Vervoordt. He holds an open day twice a year, allowing the investigators to look around.*17 The remarkable thing about the W family is that they also own properties in Knokke-Le Zoute, in streets where X1 had already started pointing out houses a few months earlier.

That same evening, the seventeenth interrogation of X1 takes place. It is the last interrogation in which Adjutant Patriek De Baets will participate. From the leadership of the Neufchâteau cell, the opposition is already clearly perceptible. 'Leadership urged that I be excluded from the Antwerp investigation,' De Baets says later. 'Duterme and his deputy Jean-Luc Decker believed we were in danger of drowning in the files. Now, of course, I know more about what was happening behind the scenes, but at the time, I could only conclude that everything was suddenly running much less smoothly.'*18

After the seventeenth interrogation, things would not improve. X1 now states that between 1990 and 1995, Tony V brought her to the castle in 'sGravenwezel at least fifteen to twenty times. She says she witnessed six to seven child murders there, including that of 'Catherine'. She mentions a Turkish girl of nine, a girl of eleven or twelve, a short-haired boy of seven or eight, a blond girl of fifteen or sixteen, a North African boy of three or four and two girls of ten - one was called Véronique.*19

That day, X1 also talks about children who were killed in other places. It was, she says, a time when she 'acted as one of them'. When Tony V needed her, he called X1's mother to determine whether her husband was home. As a truck driver at the time, Erwin Beeckman was often away from home for days at a time. With this part of her testimony, X1 returns to the words with which her friend Tania V put her in touch with Neufchâteau seven months earlier: she felt herself to be a perpetrator, said she feared that the investigation into the

dealings of Michel Nihoul would land her in prison... During this period, from 1990 to 1995, children were delivered as commodities. X1's story is becoming more and more like a Hollywood version of the Dutroux case. Her interrogators contribute to this. At the end of the interrogation, they ask if one of the girls mentioned might have been Loubna Benaïssa. X1 says that 'could have been'. 'That was pure suggestiveness on my part', De Baets later admits. Four days after the interrogation, the lifeless body of Loubna Benaïssa is found in the basement of Patrick Derochette.

The Antwerp investigation remained on the back burner in the second half of 1997. At the national coordination meetings, it was decided that everything would now depend on the Van Hees dossier. In the summer of 1997, Michel Jordens was appointed counsel at the Antwerp Court of Appeal. He was succeeded by Marleen Vyncke, who had just been selected as a new investigating judge. Several other investigators are involved in the investigation. The Antwerp X1 dossier is partly in the hands of some members of the Judiciary Police who are also investigating Kim and Ken, the Antwerp sister and brother who disappeared together in 1994.

The day before the press reports the X1 files for the first time, Tiny Mast, the mother of Kim and Ken Heyrman, is contacted by the Antwerp Judiciary Police officer Marc Ruyters, who tells her: 'All the things they will write about X1, you mustn't believe a word of it'. Given the less-than-promising evolution of the investigation, this may seem no more than a logical precaution for a police officer concerned about Tiny Mast's peace of mind. Tiny Mast is not so sure. In the past, the police have never shown the slightest concern for her welfare. Tiny Mast litigated herself silly, hoping to gain access to the judicial file on her children. In mid-1998, she even went on a hunger strike. When she does gain partial access to the file at the end of that year, she and her lawyer have to conclude that for four years, the Judiciary Police has only followed a hypothesis of investigation: the suspicion that she had killed her own children. In fact, there were many more promising leads to explain the death of her children.

On May 29th 1996, two and a half months before the Dutroux case broke out, Antwerp's Nationalestraat was stunned by an attempted kidnapping of Anja, the young daughter of the

proprietors of Taverne Thuishaven.*20 The child's screams were heard throughout the neighbourhood, and the perpetrator was arrested. His name was Steven T., 35 years old. He came from a marginal background and had been discharged from a psychiatric institution two weeks earlier. The man had been convicted several times for minor criminal offences and for the sexual assault of underage girls. In the days following the Dutroux case, rumours spread in Steven T.'s neighbourhood. Some residents of the Nationalestraat immediately linked the kidnapping attempt to Michel Nihoul. They saw him several times in May in their street, some even in the company of T. In the autumn of 1996, hundreds of individuals nationwide made allegations against Nihoul. He was seen everywhere and was identified by a whole procession of people as a rapist or child kidnapper. It is generally assumed that at least the vast majority of these accusations are based on the psychosis that Belgium was going through at the time. Still, in the case of Steven T., there is more. From prison, he writes a letter to his former partner, Linda VD, stating word for word: 'I am going to take on the Nihoul case.' Linda VD immediately delivers the letter to the court.*21

Steven T may be alluding here to what has since appeared in the press, but the name Nihoul returns. The two daughters of Linda VD already testified in 1995 about how they were taken to a studio in the centre of Antwerp by T, who, at the time, lived with their mother. There, they were forced to undress and were sexually abused in front of the camera. As early as 1995, a deviant gentleman named "Jean" appeared in their story. After the Dutroux case, the two girls also suddenly became very affirmative; the name 'Jean' was Michel Nihoul.*22

The Antwerp Judiciary Police has never shown much zeal to know the ins and outs of this story. The judicial file containing the testimonies of the two girls - aged six and nine - travels a long way from the Antwerp prosecutor's office to the Brussels one and from the national brigade to the Neufchâteau cell. In between, the Brussels city police also prepared a file on Steven T for the benefit of Neufchâteau because he has lived there for a while.*23 In the end, a member of the Duterme camp at the Brussels BOB decides that everything is based on a mix of

coincidence and revenge. Steven T is involved with Linda VD in a battle for custody of one of her daughters. Linda VD., the investigators decide, is so bitter about what T has done to her daughters that she will not hesitate to use any means to keep them away from him in the future.

The fact that the Judicial Police feels little inclination to elaborate on the testimonies of the two children may have another -or additional- reason. One of the company managers behind the studio where the children were allegedly used for pornographic filming is a former member of the Antwerp Judiciary Police. There are more coincidences in this story. Steven T appears to have been a doorman in a nightclub in Ostend in 1995. One of the regulars in that dancing was Marc Dutroux's companion, Michael Diakostavrianos, according to the Brussels police report. When the Neufchâteau police questioned Steven T at the beginning of March 1997, he formally denied knowing Nihoul, Diakostavrianos or any other suspect mentioned in the Neufchâteau files.*24

At the time of Kim and Ken's disappearance, Steven T lived around the corner from Tiny Mast. He was considered a suspect for a very short time, but not for long. The Antwerp police had his DNA profile compared with the sperm found on Kim Heyrman's body and closed this case again only based on a negative result. The Antwerp police then went back to work on the Mast dossier. 'I don't trust those people one bit,' says Tiny Mast. They are the ones who have lost Ken's sweater. I suppose the kidnapper had sent me that sweater back to scare me. In a normal country, that is a hyper-important element for the investigation. Maybe there are traces on it. Well, they made that sweater disappear. It is they who, at one point, told me to my face that I was the murderess and that I had better confess. I can regale hundreds of stories that, when I compare them to what the Verwilghen commission labelled "mistakes," really defy imagination. These guys are so aggressive and inhumane that I sometimes feel they belong to the same clique as those who took my children from me. I believe Regina Louf; I really do.*25 Isn't that too ridiculous, the idea that one of the detectives would belong to the same milieu as the perpetrators? Not in Antwerp.

At the end of 1996, the Neufchâteau cell records all telephone calls on Tony V's private line. On October 24th 1996, First Sergeant Rudy Hoskens noticed something strange. Between 4.55 pm and 5.17 pm, Tony V made eighteen phone calls to BVH, a member of the gendarmerie in Brasschaat.*26 Eighteen calls in twenty minutes. One can assume that Tony V was worried about something that day and urgently wanted to speak to his friend, the gendarme. Perhaps he had noticed that he was being followed by the SIE, which could be the case since the first shadow operation had ended four days earlier.

Shortly after a costly satellite system was deployed during March to investigate the comings and goings of Tony V as discreetly as possible, the detectives in Brussels learned that the Antwerp team had been "bolstered" with the arrival of detective... BVH. Hoskens writes a note to point out to the BOB of Brasschaat the danger, especially the absurdity of the situation. It is not that a detective is discovered to be friends with the suspect; no, it is the other way around. First, it is established that he is a close acquaintance and is involved in the investigation. And this in a dossier that is said to be the most secret of all time.

His superiors call in BVH, to whom he explains that he is a computer nerd, and Tony V is 'merely' one of the people with whom he regularly chats late into the night on chat forums. According to Odette, Tony V's former mistress, this is a lie. Without being aware of BVH's role in the investigation, she describes him as 'one of Tony's best friends. The gendarmerie's Zoller/Malicieux system does not allow internet conversations to be recorded, especially through a chat box. After October 24th, 1996, no telephone conversation was recorded between Tony V and BVH. Perhaps they only chatted after that.

NOTES:

1. Syntheses observations SIE, BOB Brussels, October 21st and November 4th, 1996, PV's 115.713, 116.517 and 116.518.
2. Side letter Michel Bourlet, April 30th, 1997, for note 37.66.112360/96.

3. Note Patriek De Baets to CBO, SIE and the director of operations at Neufchâteau, June 4th, 1997, no. 97/192.
4. Despite searches in the national register, this girl will never be found.
5. Fax X1 to BOB Brussels, December 18th 1996, PV 118.872.
6. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, February 1st 1997, PV 150.066.
7. As with X1's testimonies about Kristien, the authors preferred to use a different spelling each time X1 talks about the victim. Ferdinand, again, is a pseudonym.
8. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, February 8th 1997, PV 150.953. The authors converted the quotes used from the French translation back into Dutch.
9. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, February 15th 1997, PV 150.954. The authors converted the quotations from the French translation back into Dutch.
10. Fax X1 to BOB Brussels, February 18th 1997, PV 150.312.
11. Note De Baets to Bourlet, BOB Brussels, February 18th 1997, nr 97/323.
12. Complaint Regina Louf, Brussels BOB, March 24th 1997, PV 150.892. The complaint with the Brussels public prosecutor's office has the notation number BR.37.66.150.892/97.
13. It concerns the company Studio De Pauw, which is behind publications such as X-Gay and Gaykiss and is situated in the gay circuit. The Flemish non-profit organisation Werkgroep Morkhoven, which investigated an international child pornography network in Zandvoort in the Netherlands, says it has indications that the company also has ties with dealers in child pornography.
14. It concerns deposits through the Giro account 8238 of the ABN Amro bank.
15. It concerns photograph 129 on page 17 in the confidential police magazine 'Recherche en Informatie' of May 22nd 1999. The parents of Katrien De Cuyper will declare, when they see the photo, that it is not their daughter but add that they base their certainty on the fact that they cannot believe that she 'would have ended up in a network'. The Antwerp public prosecutor's office dismisses the case in a highly original manner. Although

every sensible person can establish the contrary, the public prosecutor's office spokeswoman declares that it 'apparently concerns a boy'.

16. X1 was filmed during this car trip, BOB Brussels, March 1st, 1997, PV 150.359.
17. Although the press would later mention Vervoordt's name, it did not appear at any time in the description of X1 nor the verifications surrounding it. They only mention the family W. BOB Brussel, March 13, 1997, PV 150.801.
18. Interview with Patriek De Baets, 7 March 1999.
19. Interrogation of X1, BOB Brussels, March 1st, 1997, PV 150.364.
20. Newspaper Het Laatste Nieuws, 31 May 1996.
21. Analysis of correspondence between Steven T. and Linda V D., BOB Brussels, March 13th, 1997, PV 150.747.
22. Also, in other testimonies recorded by Neufchâteau, it is said that Nihoul often allowed himself to be called 'Jean'.
23. The Brussels police report dates back to December 6th, 1996, and mentions the file opened with the Antwerp public prosecutor's office under note number AN.37.12.100395/95.
24. Interrogation Steven T, BOB Brussels, March 6th, 1997, PV 150.746.
25. Interview with Tiny Mast, February 23rd, 1998.
26. Results registration Zoller/Malicieux, BOB Brussels, October 24th, 1996, PV 115.982.

6 1997 - 1998

The continuation

1.If we continue like this, we'll soon have to revisit all the missing children's dossiers.

Heads of the Neufchateau cell, 1997

Logistical subjects were initially the only reason the investigators had to interact with Commander Jean-Luc Duterme. Simultaneously with the creation of the Neufchâteau cell and the relocation of this police force to a separate building in the Staatsbladstraat in Brussels, Duterme was appointed at the end of November 1996 by district commander Torrez. During the first meeting with prosecutor Bourlet, Duterme did not hide his irritation with the situation. For any issue regarding the management of the investigative team, Bourlet turns directly to the detectives themselves. Duterme overhears the others talking about dossiers he has never heard of. Everyone makes agreements with everyone else. No one seems to pay attention to him.

On December 19 1996, after barely three weeks on the job, Dutermé sent a three-page memo to the bosses of the CBO and the gendarmerie district of Brussels. It is the first note of what will become a series. In the note, Dutermé complains about the 'individualism' and 'intellectual dishonesty' he has noticed in some investigators. Here's the problem: 'I have observed that no car was available on certain evenings. I recalled specific rules of the job, namely, returning the keys. In such a case, the tax authorities should consider using a service vehicle to drive home as a benefit in kind. It must, therefore, be recorded as such on the tax certificates'*1

The Commander also calculated that, between December 2 and 15, his detectives had already done 596 hours of weekend work, 1590 hours of regular overtime and 510 hours of nighttime work. Far too much, in his opinion. He raised this issue on December 16 with Colonel Henri Berkmoes of the CBO.

Berkmoes visited the investigative cell to encourage the members of the network and told Dutermé that he should not be overly concerned since 1) the gendarmerie urgently needs to polish up its reputation, 2) the financial compensation for overtime is negligible, and 3) the country is in turmoil. Berkmoes, on the contrary, argued for less formalism. 'I am convinced that the lieutenant colonel did not want to discredit me in my task,' Dutermé wrote of this, 'but this undermined the efforts to achieve cohesion and quality.' What he means by this is evident from some of the following notes and verbal remarks: about excessive use of toilet paper, leaving lights on in the offices for too long, and a ban on spending the night in those offices - as the overworked Michel Clippe did once.

One day after Colonel Berkmoes' speech, First Sergeant Aimé Bille is in his office working on a summary of the old Van Hees murder file. Dutermé visited the precinct that afternoon, noticed Bille and asked what he was doing there on a Saturday. This event gave rise to the first significant unrest within the antenna.

For years, BOB officers from the finance section have worked relatively autonomously to everyone's liking. They can hardly understand what the sudden scrutiny is all about. In the first

week of December, adjutant Christian Pirard, head of the fifth squad, had to study the entire 139/96 file on serial rapist LV and organise the tapping of his telephone lines. Everyone knows catching LV in the act could be very important for the Dutroux case investigation. On Friday, December 6, Pirard requested permission to work through the weekend with his team, which was rejected. His minor protest against this rejection, Christian Pirard explained to the Verwilghen Commission a year later, led Dutermé to threaten him with dismissal from the Neufchâteau cell and land him with a series of unfavourable performance evaluations, which could have an extremely detrimental effect on his career.*2

In February 1997, the Pirard team was assigned the Mazibas case. When this case was discussed at a meeting at the end of April, Dutermé and his deputy Jean-Luc Decker flew into a rage. 'If we go on like this, we'll be sitting here revisiting all the missing children's dossiers in Belgium,' one of them exclaimed. Pirard and a few other investigators look at their bosses in surprise: wasn't that the intention? Pirard has to stomach another criticism : 'What you are after is a score like Legendre.'*3 Legendre is the gendarme who found the body of Loubna Benaïssa.

On May 7 1997, Pirard received a series of research assignments by Brussels substitute Philippe Meire to determine whether there may be a link between Hanim's murder and X1's statements. Five days later, Dutermé again summons Pirard. The Commander demands that he ignores the substitute's orders. Dutermé believes that substitute Meire should have followed the standard hierarchical path - through him. 'That was not possible in this case,' raises Pirard, because from 5 to

9 May, Dutermé was on vacation. On May 20, Dutermé and Decker, accompanied by Pirard, then went to Meire to explain 'that things cannot go on like this'.

A few days after the meeting with Meire, Pirard scheduled the hearing of an important witness in the Mazibas case. This is a 19-year-old man who witnessed the kidnapping as a child but was never questioned. This witness can only take leave from

work on Sundays, which is not a valid reason for Duterme and hence refuses Pirard to work on a Sunday. And more follows. The Verwilghen Commission gets its hands on a memo which shows that Duterme has forbidden the investigators to consult directly with magistrates. It is, among other reasons, a lack of this kind of communication that has made the Dutroux case a national tragedy.

From January 27 1997, investigating judge Jean-Claude Van Espen was again appointed to examine the case of the murdered girl whose name he failed to remember. Van Espen's appointment took many by surprise. A few weeks earlier, he expressed his dismay in an open letter because of the transfer of so many financial investigators to Neufchâteau. However, Van Espen has always worked very well with the 3KOS, particularly with adjutant De Baets. In judicial circles, one coffee chat between them is believed to suffice to iron out the wrinkles. But when Aimé Bille appeared before the Verwilghen Commission on October 14 1997, he handed over a nineteen-page act of defence. The note ends with: 'I am prepared to talk to the commission, possibly in even more detail, about what went on before, and I have no fear whatsoever of being confronted by the investigating judge Jean-Claude Van Espen.'⁴

For years, Bille was also one of those detectives Van Espen trusted unquestioningly. He now paints an alarming picture of how Van Espen led the Van Hees case in 1997. During a first meeting, Bille heard him say: 'I will probably have to appear before a committee. So be it. I hope the Judiciary Police haven't suckered me in.' Bille notices that Van Espen has no qualms about skipping important meetings and, rather than read the dossier, requests that he receives updates on Post-it notes about the decisions he has to make. Although he plays a vital role within the X1 dossiers, Van Espen says little during the national coordination meetings. Except for that one time, on April 25 1997. He mumbles something about Nathalie W, of whom he considers her testimony worthless, and vaguely expresses his wish to come to 'an objectification' of the X1 statements.

Van Espen was tricked, duped and deceived,' says Adjutant De Baets a year and a half later. At that time, there were secret meetings with a small group of BOB officers who wanted to destroy the X1 investigations at all costs. There, behind our backs, the crucial decisions were made. These BOB officers have, together with substitute Paule Somers -who they could manipulate with ease- concocted the sabotage of the investigation. They knew that Van Espen had little interest in the investigation, and these BOB officers who aimed to sabotage the inquiry, completely misrepresented the case fact to him.'*5

`What happened between Van Espen and De Baets during that period is highly irregular,' recalls another investigator.

`Suppose that De Baets and his men had indeed made mistakes. Suppose they had lost all sense of reality and had given the X witnesses far more credence than they deserved; even then, Van Espen's attitude cannot be explained. Van Espen had already covered up many past mistakes made by the finance section and vice versa- probably many more. There was a bond of mutual trust there. Now, friends became arch enemies from one day to the next. There was no talking, no trying to resolve the matter as adults.'

Initially, the BOB officers Baudouin Dernicourt, Philippe Pourbaix, Joël Gérard, Patrick Noller and Eddy Verhaeghen chose Dutermé's camp. They were previously involved in either the investigation into the financial dealings of Marc Dutroux and/or the interrogation of Nathalie W. The first dossier led them to the firm conviction that Dutroux was an isolated pervert. According to De Baets, the situation is different. `It comes down to this that some resolutely chose their careers,' he thinks. To be in Dutermé's good books, you only had to ridicule isolated passages from the X's interrogations. For those people, that became a kind of entertainment.'

If there is one word that will remain associated with the X1 saga for years to come, it is `rereading'. Marc Verwilghen once pointed out that `rereading' in judicial investigations is a highly unusual procedure. An investigating magistrate may ask to interrogate someone, conduct a search, wiretap a telephone line, etc. There is no shortage of methods for tracking down

perpetrators of crime. Rarely does a magistrate order the 'rereading' of all the investigative output completed up to that point. Now, this is not the case in the X1 file either. A critical reflection of X1's actual statements was not ordered by a magistrate but by Duterme. The Verwilghen Commission noted: 'The investigating director took certain decisions which, strictly speaking, were not his to take, particularly the decision to reread the files and to appoint the investigators, to the exclusion of some, who were to do so.'*6

There was much speculation in the media about the so-called reports of rereading. Often, there was talk of a 'second reading' and a 'third reading' - which gave the impression of an almost academic study. However, except for one -the least valuable - a proofreading report was never leaked to the press. Despite repeated requests, even the Verwilghen Commission never received access to the sources of the sabotage of the X-investigations. And sources these rereadings certainly are. If halfway through 1998, the judiciary will proclaim with great certainty that 'a thorough investigation was conducted', and the testimony of X1 is worthless, it is in the first place due to these reports of rereading - four in total.

No one knows that there exists, in fact, a fifth report of rereading. The situation is more severe than the Verwilghen Commission could have suspected. Duterme not only overstepped his bounds in ordering the first rereading but also made a pre-rereading of the dossier in the utmost secrecy. The authors were able to get their hands on this document. Many items that seemed incomprehensible initially have suddenly become much more evident.

Around the turn of 1996-1997, Duterme took a stack of transcripts of interrogations of X1 to his desk and began to read them. He made notes with a pencil, apparently intending to be able to erase them afterwards.*7 From his point of view, there may be a reason to do so. Jean-Luc Duterme is French-speaking and speaks ramshackle Dutch, just like Melchior Wathelet. He picks up a few words here and there, thinks he understands them, and draws his inexorable conclusions. 'She takes stuff,' says X1 on page 107 of the gruelling interrogation on November 18, 1996. X1 explains here that someone takes

fuel and throws it over 'Kristien'. Duterme failed to find an appropriate translation for the word 'stuff' in his dictionary. He circles it and puts a big question mark behind it. On the next page, X1's interrogators ask her what kind of 'stuff' she is talking about. 'the stuff they light the fire with,' she says. 'A lighter?' the interrogator tries. 'No,' says X1. 'A liquid?' asks the interrogator. 'Yes', says X1. According to his handwriting, Duterme is in uproar: 'That's not what she is talking about!'⁸ However, it will be apparent to any Dutch speaker reading this passage from the first line that X1, by 'stuff', could only be referring to a liquid.

On page 58, the detectives ask X1 what Kristien was shouting when she was being tortured. At that point, X1 looks around a bit confused and says, 'What?' The question is repeated, to which X1 responds this time. This is different from how Duterme understood it. 'Doesn't respond', he writes in French. To the extent that he understands anything about the language used by X1, Duterme does little to keep his attention on it. On page 69, X1 describes some objects she noticed in the old mushroom farm. She talks about a 'bus' (Flemish dialect word for 'can') that was on the ground and about which she will later clarify that it contained that 'stuff'. It is easy to understand that she is talking about a jerry can or something along those lines. On page 100, X1 revisits the objects already described: 'Here is that jerry can, and some bags with stuff in them...' Duterme still doesn't seem to have figured out what 'bus' means, and with a rough stroke, he circles the word 'jerry can'. He adds: 'This is not the object she speaks of at the beginning.' Perhaps he mistook the 'bus' of which X1 spoke a few lines higher for a city bus...

Sometimes, Duterme's linguistic ignorance is pitiful. On page 102, X1 describes the house next door to the old mushroom farm. This materially verifiable part of her statement puzzles even the most ardent X1 critics to this day. Among other things, X1 talks about three meat hooks in the ceiling. She says: 'My grandmother had those in her kitchen too.' The fact that X1 adds this information to explain why she specifically recalled the meat hooks completely escapes Duterme. He reads the word 'grandmother' and immediately concludes that

X1 is saying here that she, too, was present at the murder. Duterme writes: So, we find her (grandmother) present too. `*9

Dossier knowledge is not Duterme's strong point. When X1 says on page 33 that Kristien also spoke Dutch, he cannot control his pencil: `She is F!' F. apparently stands for "French speaker." Duterme does not know that Christine Van Hees' mother grew up in Oostende (in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), and her daughter spoke quite a bit of Dutch—much more than Duterme himself, it seems.

Duterme's most frequent remark consists of three letters: "SVP!" ("S'il vous plait" : meaning: "Are you kidding") From the very first page he reread, SVPs already abound. Every time X1 answers `I don't know', it is underlined, or an SVP follows. There is also no lack of SVPs when X1 refers to one of her alter personas. And when, at some point during the October 31 interrogation, she goes silent for a long while, fixes a table with her eyes, and the interrogator breaks the silence by asking what she sees, Duterme writes, 'Hypnosis?!' He seems extremely sensitive to any sign of friendship between De Baets and X1. During a rather pleasant interrogation of December 9, his cell phone rings. X1 makes a joke: 'The most wanted, huh?' Duterme is not amused. "Idéalisation" he notes.

Gradually, Duterme turns increasingly cynical. Halfway through the interrogation of November 18, X1 describes how Kristien is raped again. 'And it goes on,' Duterme contemptuously writes next to the passage. At the end of the interrogation, an agitated X1 can't get herself to say the word `knife'. The interrogators insist, and Duterme draws rough lines next to their questions, followed by the obligatory `SVP! When X1 does manage to pronounce the word, Duterme writes: `Finally, she gets it.'

That's about it, the first rereading of the interrogations of X1, also called `objectification'. Based on these findings, which are very revealing in Duterme's eyes, he decides to put together a team of investigators to work on what will have to be the first official rereading. He appointed the three investigators: the Sergeants Patrick Moller, Joël Gérard, and the First Sergeant Baudouin Dernicourt. Noller is a Liège native; Gérard has lived in Wavre since birth; Dernicourt was born in Ronse (a village

in Dutch-speaking Flanders) but is as French-speaking as his two Walloon colleagues. Even more than the language skills of the three BOB officers, their objectivity can be questioned. Most of them are already involved in the psychological warfare surrounding the Nathalie W inquiry. BOB Philippe Pourbaix will later tell whoever wants to hear that he actively collaborated in the first rereading and that his signature on the final report is only missing because he was absent when it was submitted. Pourbaix is also a French speaker.

A month before the first rereading was finished, Commander Dutorme had already drawn his conclusions. On June 3, 1997, in a five-page note to the Brussels BOB commander, he expressed his strong opinion on the progress of the X investigations: "After the investigative team was installed in new premises on December 2, 1996, I began to take an interest in the investigations. My initiative, which the BOB and the magistrates were aware of before I accepted the mission, was taken very badly by Sergeant De Baets. I found that he could not tolerate leadership in his investigations and allowed no oversight (...). For the record, this detective presented me to the authorities in Neufchâteau as if I only dealt with wallpaper and ballpoint pens. (...) From the beginning, Sergeant De Baets stubbornly refused to produce written reports (i.e. short summaries of the information in his possession). His favourite comment was: it's all in my head.'

The big problem, Dutorme said, is that the bond between De Baets and X1 is too close. The interrogator would have given 'feedback' regularly to X1. That may be well-intentioned advice from the psychologists involved in the investigation, but: 'a prudent investigator must understand that he must avoid self-promotion or possible fabrication' with these individuals. In his note, Dutorme admits that he had already carried out a sort of rereading and also made no secret of the fact that the procedure that followed was a personal initiative of his: 'In the interrogations of adjutant De Baets, which I have read (I have not read them all, nor watched them), it appeared that the syntheses in French did not always correspond to the written-out text of the video cassette. In the original interrogation, one sometimes finds passages in which the detective's hypothesis is overwhelmingly reflected (...).

Answers are also suggested. Hence the importance of nuance. Without wishing to accuse the investigator of anything, I then proposed, with our experience, to proceed to a global reflection on all our dossiers. This was to come to a state of affairs in a climate that was no longer as emotionally charged as it had been at the beginning. Adjutant De Baets then questioned my ability to motivate people. (...) Sometimes, I thought sensational arrests and the mediatisation of the dossier were his main concerns. Based on my findings and other investigators' support, I appointed a team to reread and analyse the interrogations conducted by Adjutant De Baets.'

Dutermé concludes: 'I was confronted with a manipulative investigator (...), a dangerously subjective detective who would never admit that a hypothesis he had formulated could be wrong (...). I was confronted with a researcher who had taken advantage of the sensitive and emotional climate after the Dutroux case to try to evade his hierarchy, aiming to feed his vanity. If the nature of the investigation and its vibrant atmosphere were not what they are today, I would not have agreed for a

long time with the line of conduct of this investigator, in whom I have lost all confidence (...). However, it does not seem appropriate to me at this time to propose a disciplinary investigation. As I have already shown, the person's position in the inquiry is critical, and a possible measure of removal of the chief investigator would now look very bad. Some might believe or be led to think there is a desire to slow down the investigation.*10

On July 2, 1996, Noller, Gérard and Dernicourt delivered their paper—the first report of rereading.

Subject: commented reading of the interrogations of witness X1. Ref. Dossier 64185 of examining magistrate Van Espen in Brussels.

As announced during the meeting of April 25 1997, with the representatives of the various public prosecutors involved in the Bagou investigation and the investigators, and also at

the request of examining magistrate Van Espen, within the framework of his file, we proceeded to a critical reading of the interrogations of witness X1. To do this, we have based ourselves only on the interrogations in dossier 64/85 and handed over by the examining magistrate, Mr. Van Espen. Out of concern for objectivity, we have not consulted the 'investigation' file containing the verifications carried out by the team in charge of the Campion dossier. We limited ourselves to the methodology of the investigation.

First, concerning the interrogations, we must first observe the poor quality of the work entrusted to the sworn translators. The French text is sometimes unreadable and incomprehensible, so we have relied on the original text in case of doubt.

Nevertheless, we could observe that the interrogations were sometimes suggestive in nature, that their presentation did not always correspond to their content, that the testimony contained improbabilities, and that the scenario evolved during the interrogations.

1. Regarding the suggestive nature of the interrogations.

A. Suggestive and directed questions orient interrogations. Example: PV 100,133 of 13111196.

Page 100-101: As X1 finishes her story about the torture of Christine, the interrogators insist (four consecutive questions) on knowing if she did not notice any particular smell, making her say that Christine was killed by fire.

Page 114: When X1 states that she was eleven at the time of the facts, the detectives try to get closer to 1984, the year of Christine Van Hees' murder. If X1 is eleven years old, as she claims, her story relates to a fact that occurred in 1980.

Pages 116-118: The detectives provide X1 with all the details about how

Christine was tied up. PV 150.537 of 18/11/96. Page 3: X1 admits that she cannot remember her age at the time of the facts, but at the same time, can specify that she was quite young, that she no longer lived in Knokke and that she situated the event shortly after Knokke. The detective quickly responds with a confirmation rather than a question: 'Probably that must have been quite a while after

Knokke!' This is significant: X1 initially states that she was eleven at the time of the facts, which makes her presence at the murder of Christine Van Hees impossible.

Page 131: X1 speaks of an axe which the detectives transform into a knife. When X1 describes how and with what Christine is tied down, the detectives insist. On February 2, 1997, X1 suddenly spoke with certainty of a hemp cord, inconsistent with the findings of the Judiciary Police interrogation of 1/2/97.

Page 14: People are concerned about Christine's age in the question. X1 replies that it should match that of Mieke, about whom she never provided an exact answer. In response, the detective deems it necessary to confirm that Christine was 16 years old.

Pages 72 and 73: They question X1 about Nihoul's attire. In one question, one deems it necessary to point out that he always wore old clothes.

B. testimony is influenced by questions referring to alleged statements made by X1.

Example: interrogation of 1/2/97. Pages 1 and 2: At the beginning of the interrogation, the detective provides a condensed scenario of a previous interrogation. Through the reading of the different interrogations, we could deduce that this is a manoeuvre intended to communicate to the witness precise details about the victim's identity, the date of the facts and the geographical situation. The name Christine Van Hees is mentioned in the question, and the date is February 13. One also speaks of the mushroom farm. The witness does not know the name of Christine Van Hees and has never clearly spoken of a mushroom farm.

C. The witness is placed in the vicinity of the evidence.

The PV 150.093 of 8/2/97 reports that the witness accidentally revealed the location of the items of evidence confiscated at the crime scene (iron wire, hammer, cords, pieces of wood, leather vest, jerrycan...). This 'incident' has the consequence that the testimony of X1 will always be questionable from the moment this spectacle could influence it.

D. The investigators show the witness suggestive photographs.

Example: PV 100.133 of 13/11/96. Several photos were shown to X1 on 13/11/96. Photo P10, which does not

resemble Christine Van Hees at all, was pointed out by the witness. Why then continue with other confrontations rather than correct the choice she made? PV 100.408 of 11/1/97. On 11.1.97, X1 is shown a photograph of a man who turns his key in the lock of the house's front door with the number 55. In the question put to X1, she is told that the photograph was taken in Auderghem, in the Théo Van Péstraat, number 55. We learn from the answer that X1 effectively recognises the person and that she associates the photograph with the house, located at 55 Théo Van Péstraat, where she had passed a month earlier in the company of the detectives.

2. The presentation of the facts in the summary minutes is not always faithful to the content of the interrogations.

A. In the 'synthesis PVs' of the interrogations. Example: PV 116.990 of 13/11/96.

In PV 116.990, page 26, lines 1254, 1256, 1258 and 1259, the interrogators make an abbreviation that misrepresents the issues: X1, who would have spontaneously stated what was actually suggested to her by the investigators, namely the particular way Christine was tied up. The reading of the interrogation allows us to establish that the witness is getting away with it by agreeing, in the form of an answer, to the questions put to her. This removes any spontaneity from the testimony.

B. During the presentation of photographs. Example: PV 116.990 of 13/11/96. In PV 116.990, it is said that X1 identified photo P10 as corresponding to Christine Van Hees. Nowhere is it said that this picture refers to a woman who has absolutely nothing to do with Van Hees and who, moreover, does not even look like her.

3. Flagrant improbabilities that her statement is teeming with. Annex 1 contains a synoptic table of the three main interrogations. This table shows the evolution of the story according to the interrogations, based on the date of the facts (perpetrators and victims), the place descriptions, the nature of the points, and the *modus operandi*.

The story's incoherence and the scenario's permanent evolution confirm that the interrogations are directed.

A precise example confirms it: in the first interrogations, X1 presents the murder as the result of sexual competition between the victims. This scenario evolves over the months to end at an interrogation scene in which Christine is subjected to a barrage of questions so that -under torture- she would communicate the place where an object is hidden(1.2.97). The primary dossier had not yet been handed over to the cell during the first interrogations. As soon as this dossier could be consulted, it was possible to see that the interrogations of X1 'did not make sense'. An interesting but anonymous witness reported on February 20, 1984, that Christine secretly kept a diary that she hid under a stone floor of a loft. This testimony was brought to the attention of the detectives who questioned X1. The synthesis report 16.504, prepared by Commissioner Ceuppens of the Judiciary Police, reports the following: 'We are continuing the investigation in the BrandWhitlock squat. During thorough searches, we discovered a plasticised notebook with checkered pages from which pages had been torn. This notebook was discovered on 18.4.84 on the second floor of the squat, where the Iroquois moved into. Believing that this notebook could be the victim's diary, the investigators handed it to the parents of Christine Van Hees. The father, Pierre Van Hees, recognised the notebook with certainty as belonging to his daughter and expressed himself about it compellingly.' How could X1 have known of the existence of this diary? How is it that this notebook was found on a suspect in the initial file who is totally foreign to the individuals X1 describes today? Why would Nihoul and E*11 have tortured Christine to obtain a notebook that was eventually found on a punk? Other examples: In Appendix 2, we attach a table listing the improbabilities identified in the three main interrogations. We can also report that the witness habitually evades certain probing questions. Either X1 is creating an escape route for herself, or she is taking advantage of the opportunity presented to her not to answer the questions—examples: PV 100.133 of 13/11/96.

Pages 11, 12 and 13: X1 cannot locate Nihoul's apartment. She suggests that the apartment does not belong to Nihoul to talk her way out of it. Starting from this, she can afford to specify that she took the elevator and mention any other

details without being able to contradict her since the place could not be identified.

Page 16: We note that on the occasion of her movements, X1 is systematically blindfolded or in a position from which she sees nothing (fellatio of the driver, for example). PV 150.537 of 18/11/96.

Page 48: Questioned about Christine's cries, X1 says she has already answered that question, which the reading of the interrogation shows is not the case.

Page 62: The witness turns the tables, creating riddles for the detectives.

Page 67: Upon leaving the riding school, as is Christine, X1 is naked with only a satin hood over her head. Once again, this leaves X1 with no explanation of the route taken.

Interrogation of 1/2/97. Pages 8 and 9: Sharply questioned, over a space of two pages, regarding the route taken, X1 cannot answer. This is followed by the suggestion of a detective asking her if she is not blindfolded. X1 immediately accepts this suggestion and details how she was blindfolded without mentioning the route she took.

Signed: Noller Patrick, Gérard Joël, Dernicourt.*12

Crushing. That is the general conclusion of all those who see this document. It

seems inevitable that even the most dramatic of all the Neufchâteau leads can be quietly forgotten. On July 10, a meeting occurs with the investigating judges Langlois and Van Espen, Duterme, Decker, the three rereaders and some of their kindred spirits. De Baets and Mertens are not invited, even though the meeting concerns them. They are bluntly accused during the meeting of having 'molested' and 'manipulated' the entire X1 investigation.

The basis for that suspicion is the first rereading. What has apparently stuck with Duterme and Van Espen the most from this is the passage describing how, on November 13 1996, X1 mistakenly refers to the girl in the photograph P10 as being 'Kristien'. From the rereading, they deduce that De Baets has led the magistrates to believe that X1 did indeed 'recognise' the photograph of Christine Van Hees. Falsification of writings, they conclude.

Not only Duterme but also Van Espen took a stand even before the completion of the first rereading. On June 22, he wrote a lengthy letter to the Brussels gendarmerie chief. In this letter, the examining magistrate gets very worked up about the fact that an 'unnamed investigator' (obviously referring to De Baets) has had contact with councillor Etienne Marique, who at that time is acting on behalf of the Verwilghen Commission. Marique came across a witness who said he could prove that Michel Nihoul was a very close acquaintance of the former prime minister X1 referred to in her statements in the 1970s. Marique, more or less aware of the X1 investigations, asked De Baets for some information about this witness, to which he suggested adding these data in parallel to the Van Hees file. These data points were indeed the subject of both searches. However, according to Van Espen, this is a procedural error given the constitutional separation of powers.

Of course, it is uncommon for police officers to simultaneously work for the public prosecutor and parliament. Still, given that this only involved passing on a few biographical details, the Verwilghen Commission later referred to this as looking for a stick to beat the dog. *13 Van Espen's letter, lyrical and peppered with references to 19th-century articles of law, ends with this paragraph: 'Considering that it is now a matter of avoiding any risk of contaminating the investigation referred to above and for which I was asked, and in anticipation of your clarifications and concrete proposals, allow me to suspend all research assignments requested or announced by my cabinet, on the understanding that I will continue this investigation myself, without any assistance from your services.' *14 The De Baets team is no longer allowed to search for the killers of Christine Van Hees but remains connected to the Neufchâteau cell. However, this situation lasted only a few days. Before reconciliation or consultation can occur, the second domino also topples. A copy of Van Espen's letter ends up on the desk of the Gent prosecutor Soenen. When a copy of the first rereading arrives on the desk of the Gent prosecutor, he also withdraws his confidence in the Brussels detectives. The timing of Van Espen's letter is nothing short of miraculous. Except for two weeks, it coincides with the Ant/256 report. If there was no back-channel talk between

Duterme and Van Espen, one could certainly speak of an incredible coincidence. De Baets was not officially informed of the first rereading. He does get a look at the document, reads it and says: 'Bullshit.' A well-founded rebuttal is not forthcoming. The only investigator who responds is Rudy Hoskens, chief of the first squad. He wrote a lengthy memo to his superiors on July 14, explaining how he and his colleagues have been fully committed to the Neufchâteau investigations since August 1996, neglecting their family life and feeling 'completely sidelined'. Hoskens does not dispute that the interrogations may have had a suggestive character and admits 'that certain things in the statements of X1 seem impossible at first sight' but maintains that there are 'enough elements in the dossier so that this cannot be ignored'. His criticism of the rereading is rather general: 'This report (6 pages) was prepared based on three interrogations of X1. This, notwithstanding the fact that in the "Champion" file, seven interrogations of X1 were selected out of a total of seventeen. The report only highlights the negative elements of the interrogations; there is no positive element. Not a single video cassette of the interrogations was viewed. At no time was there consultation with the adjutant De Baets, indicated as "enquêteur principal" and manager of the file resulting from the information given by X1. Nor was there any consultation with the members of the first team (...).'*15

Defeatism radiates from Hoskens' note. It is as if the BOB officer had already understood that the X1 investigations were dead in the water.

Take the first 'evidence' of suggestive questioning. The rereaders accuse the interrogators of asking X1 four times in a row on November 13 whether she 'did not notice any particular smell'. Only then would X1 have said that Kristien was burned. Whether 'scent' immediately evokes an association with fire is questionable, but okay. Let us return for a moment to the passage in question. It turns out it didn't go how the rereaders described it. This is what was really said:

- Do you smell something in that place?
- I know very well that, uh... that... I know very well that...
- Is there a smell in that place?
- Yes, there is.

- Can you describe the smell?
- No.
- Is there anyone else who can describe that smell?
- If you already know what's happening, why do you want me to say it?
- If?
- If you already know what's happening, why do you want me to say it?
- No, I don't. I don't know what happened. Maybe I do know what happened, but you must help me to... You don't want to help?
- Yes, I do. It was so, so... uh... They burned her.
- They what?
- They burned her.*16

Nothing more, nothing less. One can conclude with at least reasonable arguments that X1 immediately knew exactly where her interrogators wanted to go and was irritated by the fact that they did not want to give her the time to settle into her own story.*17 Anyone who has access to all of the interrogations of X1 will notice that her interrogators are constantly fishing for temperatures and smells in almost every one of her descriptions.

Sometimes, suggestive questions were posed, which obviously did not escape the rereader. X1 did say on November 13 that she thought she was 'eleven years old' at the time of the facts. It is also true that one of the interrogators tried to help her move forward in time, but what the rereaders never mention is that X1, both during the interrogation of November 13 and six days later, repeatedly stresses that, in fact, she 'absolutely cannot remember' when Kristien's murder took place. Pertinent, on the face of it, is this comment, again about the November 13 interrogation: 'Searchers will provide X1 with all the details about how Christine was tied up.' The rereaders are referring to this passage:

- How is she lying there at that moment? On her back or her stomach?
- On her stomach.
- Do you see her arms?
- (Nods, yes.)

- Are they tied up somewhere?
- (Nods, yes.)
- And her legs, are they tied?
- (Nods, yes.)
- Her legs, are they folded?
- (Nods, yes.)
- Does that cord go from her hands to her feet, something like that, to her legs?
- Like that, I say. Like a rabbit.

Pure suggestion. Without a shadow of a doubt. At least, that's how it seems when you take this bit of dialogue out of context and forget to mention what preceded it. It is essential to know that when the charred body of Christine Van Hees was found, experts immediately made the comparison with a technique taught to paratroopers: tying the opponent with a knot connecting the legs to the neck so that he suffocates himself with every movement of the legs. This is her answer when X1 is asked for the first time how 'Kristien' was tied up:

- It's well thought out.
- How?
- That it's well thought out.
- Can you describe it step by step?
- Oh, my God, no. Not really... but it reminds me of a rabbit in a trap. The more it struggles, the more awkward it gets.*18

In the appendices to their report, the rereaders omit this part of the interrogation. They present it as if the entire dialogue had been limited to the game of question and answer around the tying.

The report attempts to show that X1 has it all wrong when she describes the kind of rope Kristien was tied with. '... a hemp rope, which does not agree with the findings of the Judiciary Police', the rereader writes. Fortunately, the objects found at the murder scene at the time have been preserved, and an inventory has even been drawn up of them per the official report. This is what was delivered to the registry of the disciplinary court in Brussels on February 15, 1984, under registration number 3275: '... a hammer, a crowbar, a container with an amber-coloured liquid (probably gasoline) in it, a torn poster, a 1 meter 80 long cord...' You don't even have

to look for a 1984 inventory. In the report of rereading itself, we read a few lines further: `...items of evidence seized at the scene of the crime (wire, hammer, cords...).'

It gets better. Halfway through page two, the report mentions a case of what appears to be manifest suggestiveness, this time during the February 1, 1997 interrogation. Concerning the age of `Kristien', X1 answers that it must correspond to that of Mieke, alias Marie-Thérèse. According to the rereaders, X1 never mentioned the age of Marie-Thérèse. `Thereupon, the detective considers it useful to confirm that Christine was sixteen years old,' the report states. De Baets would have divulged the age of Christine Van Hees to X1 in this subtle way? It is a great hypothesis, but it has a slight problem. During the interrogation of December 10 1996, more than one and a half months earlier, this was said:

- Who was Marie-Thérèse?
- A French-speaking girl, uh, about sixteen years old.*19

Here, we come to the point where the rereaders prove the earth is square. The complete text of the eleventh interrogation was sent to the magistrates in Brussels and Neufchâteau on December 19 1996. Insofar as this would detract from the ridiculousness of their argument, the rereaders can hardly claim not to know about this interrogation. In fact, Commander Duterme - with whom they meet daily - had already made notes on it at the beginning of 1997.

The rereaders are also annoyed by the fact that De Baets had the habit of giving a summary of the result of the previous one at the beginning of an interrogation.

The rereaders accuse him of dropping the name Van Hees on February 1, 1997, where until then, there was the only mention of Kristien. On that occasion, the rereaders say, there is also, for the first time, mention of a mushroom farm to X1. This perspective is totally false, a not-at-all-time-consuming verification shows. In a fax dated December 18 1996 - a month and a half earlier - X1 writes: `Mieke knew a lot about Kristien, by the way. She knew that Kristien knew the mushroom farm; she had been there before with her...`*20

Of course, De Baets may have already dropped this term before December 18. In that case, the rereader's comment remains just as pertinent. But what on earth is the significance of this? X1 has already described in detail the murder scene for this on its own merits. The term 'in detail' comes from substitute Paule Somers when she defends the conclusion of the Brussels X1 investigation in an interview with De Morgen on May 2 1998. Acknowledging the pertinence of some elements in the X1 testimony is difficult for her. She adds in the same breath: 'Some details have also surprised us. It is up to examining magistrate Pignolet to determine how that is possible.'²¹ Pignolet, so was the general expectation at the time, would show how De Baets manipulated the entire X1 investigation.

The rereaders have their doubts about an incident on February 8 1997, when X1 was shown in the office of Sergeant Michel Clippe the objects that the Judiciary Police found at the scene of the murder (and in the house next door): iron wire, hammer, rope, piece of wood, leather jacket, jerry can... In De Baets and De Pauw's report about this, we read: 'These objects immediately draw the attention of X1. She puts her hand in front of her mouth and says: that's Kristien's! ²² According to the rereaders, this is a set-up to help the witness. What they do not mention in their report is the following passage from the interrogation of November 18, 1996, two months earlier. It is an interrogation that is nevertheless part of their mission. X1 describes what she saw lying on the ground:

- It's like this, it's like this, yeah...
- What is it?
- There are things on the ground.
- There are tools on the floor. Do you know these things? Yes and no. There is a green can and rope.
- What is there?
- Rope.
- Rope. What else do you see?
- I don't see anything else.
- The green can is plastic or iron. Have you seen it anywhere?
- No, it's like... it's like, gosh, it's like the army, that colour.

A little further on in the interrogation, X1 is even more descriptive:

- The space?
- In the space... There's a floor. It feels too cold to be a... to be a wooden floor. This is where the jerrycan is. There were some other items lying on the floor...*23

This interview happened two and a half months before February 8 and two weeks before the X1 detectives had access to the old murder dossier. By then, X1 had already explained what objects she had observed in the place. The question arises as to what X1 still needed to be taught about the objects found at the murder scene in February 1997.

The rereading also dwells on photo P10. When, at the end of the gruelling interrogation of November 13, X1 had to pick the photo of Christine Van Hees from a set of five, she pointed to the wrong one. She says it was on purpose because she was sick and tired and wanted to end the interrogation this way. The rereaders now claim without hesitation that interrogators De Baets and Hupez failed to inform the magistrates about this and to present it as if X1 did recognise the picture of Christine Van Hees: 'Nowhere is it said that this photograph refers to a woman who has absolutely nothing to do with Van Hees and who, moreover, does not even look like her.' So it says literally. What is the reality? On December 6 1996, co-respondent Philippe Hupez sent the official report with number 117.487 to examining magistrate Jacques Langlois in Neufchâteau:

Subject: Identification of photo X1-P10

Findings: During her interrogation, reproduced in the court record under reference A, X1 described the murder of a victim, Christine (...). X1 states that she recognises Christine among the photographs presented to her but does not select the photo she recognises. The question is posed again to X1 (line 1305 and onwards), who hesitates for a very long time and repeatedly, awkwardly, makes the same arguments regarding this recognition: - If I do it, the memory will become a reality again - I am afraid of being mistaken - It has been so long ago - I doubt myself- I recognised her, but I doubt myself, because it was in

different circumstances, certainly other circumstances than on the photograph. Eventually, X1 points to the photo X1-P10. We identify the person depicted in image P10 as D Anik (...). It is manifestly not the victim that X1 is talking about. (...)

From this, we conclude:

1. The photo P10, indicated by X1, is not the one of the victims she is talking about, Christine.
2. But the photo of this victim is among those shown to X1, which she deliberately did not designate.*24

Now we are really in Absurdistan. The official report, which the rereaders claim does not exist, does, in fact, exist and leaves nothing to be desired regarding clarity. The magistrates calmly note the rereading and accept what it says as accurate.

Noteworthy about the rereadings are the contradictions which the investigators noticed in the X1 interrogations. In a separate appendix, they list how X1 makes offenders come and go in her statements. One time, she mentioned the names of certain individuals, but during the subsequent interrogation about the same facts, she suddenly failed to mention those names again and/or substituted them with different names. Halfway through 1997, the remark by the rereaders still seems highly pertinent. Their perspective lost credibility after the team of experts examined X1 for months and wrote on October 8 in its report that memory in victims of severe childhood sexual abuse, as in X1's case, is 'an active process of construction and reconstruction' and 'internal contradictions' are mentioned as one of the four main characteristics of a more or less truthful testimony.*25

The rereaders also seem to have a point with their claim that X1 adapts her version about the motive for the murder of 'Kristien' as soon as the detectives get hold of the old dossier. Until then, they say, X1 has been talking about some sexual competition forfeited by 'Kristien'. For several months, this scenario then evolves into a situation in which everything suddenly revolves around a secret diary in which she describes how she had ended up in a prostitution network and wants to escape from it. The interrogations are unmistakably steered, according to the rereaders. Again, it is helpful to delve into the

interrogations and faxes to find out exactly when X1 stated what. And what does this reveal? There is no evolution at all. During her first two interrogations about Kristien, on November 13 and 18, X1 indeed mentions a sexual competition. At no time, however, does she point to it as a direct 'motive' for the murder. During the hearing on November 18, the main ingredients in her character sketch of 'Kristien' were already amply present. For example, in this passage:

- Can we then assume that Kristien was less "initiated"?
- No.
- Or not as long...?
- No
- ...engaged?
- Not on that front, anyway. And the rest, I can't say. But she doesn't know the system very well yet. I don't know if you understand what I'm struggling with... I'm having a hard time with the fact that she was so ignorant...

During the subsequent interrogations about Kristien, on December 10, 11, and 12, X1 talks even more extensively about her despair and the dramas that will ensue.

She speaks for hours about nothing else. It can be argued that these three interrogations date after December 4, 1996, when the De Baets team got hold of the old murder file.

Nevertheless, it is doubtful - and in any case not proven - that the interrogators could 'direct' the three interrogations based on this. De Baets maintains to this day that he deliberately did not allow himself to be informed about the dossiers' analysis - 'I had no time for that anyway' - precisely to avoid later suspicions of manipulation. The so-called 'investigation team' did not start rooting around in the old dossier on December 4. Aimé Bille only began on December 10.*26 He delivered his first synthesis report on December 27th.*27 Only from that day onwards was it possible to draw knowledge from the old dossier and use it during subsequent interrogations of X1 without too much chance of making mistakes. This is apparently also the thesis of the rereaders. But it is incorrect. Nine days before December 27, X1 mentioned secret writings that cost 'Kristien' her life. She does so in a fax: 'They knew

that Christine was becoming a menace, and they also apparently knew that she was writing things down. They called her a traitor there in the mushroom farm...'*28

The rereaders further assert that when asked about Kristien's cries, X1 responded by saying she had already answered them. 'On reading the interrogation, this does not appear to be the case,' they posit. They accuse the interrogators of letting this happen just like that. The rereaders did not have to reread the entire interrogation to find the passage where X1 answers this question - albeit inconsistently. It is only a few lines higher on the page before, but the rereaders omit to read this passage. One of their final comments is about supposed role reversal, where X1 would create 'riddles' for her interrogators. The rereaders, it appears from one of the appendices to their report, are referring to this passage:

- Who makes that demand, and who communicates it?
- Bouty tells her to shut up, and you can guess who will have to rape her with that snake.
- What?
- I was saying: you can imagine who'll have to rape her with that snake.
- No, I can't guess. Is it someone you're always having trouble with?

This 'finding' apparently goes back to Commander Duterme's collected works. In his rereading avant-la-lettre, he has twice drawn a wide circle around the word 'guess'. Perhaps he also looked up that word in his Dutch/French dictionary and is unaware that 'you can guess' is a very frequently used expression in Dutch that has nothing to do with quizzes. And with that, we've had it. None of the arguments listed in the first reread passed the reality check. Noller, Gérard, and Dernicourt created a virtual reality and fooled the magistrates.

Even without our own 'reading of the rereading', there are legitimate reasons to doubt the conduct of certain investigators. In early June 1998, the book "L'Enquête Manipulée" by René-Philippe Dawant, a journalist involved in the RTBf program "Au Nom de la Loi", was published. As the

title of his work suggests, Dawant agrees with the view of the Au Nom de la Loi team that X1 had all the information whispered to her.*29 He 'proves' this thesis using some passages from the interrogations of X1, presented as authentic. The Brussels psychiatrist Marc Reisinger, founder of the non-profit organisation Pour la Vérité, makes a bizarre discovery on page 209 of the book. As a typical example of a suggestive interrogation, Dawant quotes this 'passage' from the interrogation of November 13 1996:

- Do you smell anything?
- No.
- Can you describe the smell?
- If you already know what's happening, why do you want me to say it?!
- They're burning her. Can't you see? Don't you have any idea what's happening?
- (no answer)

It suffices to compare this passage with the original quote, reproduced twice in this book by now, to understand what has happened here. A 'yes' becomes a 'no'. In reality, it is X1 who stated that Kristien was being burned. In this passage, it appears as if one of her interrogators made that comment. The sentence 'They are burning her...' was simply added by Dawant.*30

On March 9 1999, Dawant admitted to what he calls his 'little mistake' during a debate in Tubize. But none of it matters in his opinion since it had been established in the interim that Regina Louf is a madwoman. 'By way of example, I included some of her statements in my book,' Dawant says. 'I transcribed them because I saw the dossier. I just took notes, and in noting them down, I switched two sentences. A minor mistake? Yesses that become no's, statements made by the witness that end up in the mouth of the interrogator? Curious. One is more inclined to believe that one of Duterme's faithful cops misled the journalist.'

During a TV debate on the conclusion of the X1 investigations, Reisinger pointed out the rather remarkable differences between Dawant's official reports and the authentic ones, which immediately made him betray his possession of

copies.*31 This caused him to lash out. Not only an indignant Dawant himself but also substitute Somers are present in the studio that Sunday. Two days after the debate, she, together with examining magistrate Pignolet and detectives from the Brussels police force, searched Reisinger's home and practice.

`On that occasion, Mrs Somers admitted that my version of the interrogation in question was the only correct one,' Reisinger says later.*32 No investigation into the forgeries identified by Reisinger was carried out.

During the secret meeting of July 10, 1997, investigating judge Langlois, apparently very interested in the results of the first rereading, decided to immediately put all the remaining files of the Dutroux case through the same procedure. These are the files 109/96 (declarations X1, X2 and X3), 110/96 (declarations Nathalie W), 111/96 (Jean-Paul Raemaekers) and even 139/96 (the serial rapist L.V). Langlois' assignment for the 109/96 file reads as follows: "A team of investigators, different from those who conducted the interrogations of X1, X2 and X3, is given the task of rereading them. With some sense of cynicism, Langlois adds: `To draw up a list of tasks still to be carried out to provide credibility to the statements of the witnesses.' *33

The consequences are inevitable. The next day, Patriek De Baets, Rudy Hoskens, Aimé Bille, Danny De Pauw and Stephane Liesenborgs, all members of the first team, are `retired'. They are advised to reclaim their copious amount of nocturnal, weekend and other overtime, which they do. They are scheduled to return to the antenna-Neufchâteau after the summer. It is expected that by then, the various rereadings will have clarified how to proceed with the X1 investigations. On August 21, 1997, the weekly magazine Pan triumphantly reported on its front page that De Baets and his team had been removed from the Neufchâteau cell. Pan is headed by former Prime Minister Paul Vanden Boeynants.*34 This is not necessarily a guarantee of unbiased reporting but apparently one of clairvoyance. On August 21, the De Baets team had not yet been removed from the cell, which happened four days later. On August 25, De Baets and his colleagues are told by gendarme colonel Brabant that they will be removed from the cell `for the time being'. BOB officer Danny De Pauw is allowed to stay. 'He was the Judas of our team', says one of those involved later. He suspected immediately that his career

was about to go to hell. So from that day on, he endeavoured to put us in a bad light in notes of all kinds, thus contributing to a climate of suspicion against De Baets.

The immediate cause of De Baets' removal was a letter addressed by Commander Duterme to Langlois on August 20. Since neither Ghent nor Brussels wants to work with De Baets any longer since the first rereading, Duterme considers it only logical that the foursome are to return to the financial section. Even before Langlois can respond, Duterme informs him that they will be 'temporarily' removed from the antenna, 'pending the investigation into the dysfunctions they are charged with.' So again, Duterme is doing this on his own. At that point, even Langlois thinks Duterme is going too far, as is evident from the letter he addresses to Duterme on September 2: 'With this letter, I confirm to you that, in the present state of affairs, I am fundamentally opposed to the removal from the cell of several investigators, in particular adjutant Patriek De Baets and his team. Such a measure can only be taken once those involved have had an opportunity to answer for what they may be accused of.' *35

This letter will be his last. De Baets, Bille, Hoskens and Liesenborgs are not given the opportunity to reply. A few weeks later, De Baets learns that the Brussels public prosecutor's office has opened an investigation into the alleged 'manipulation' of the X1 investigations. On September 30 1997, examining magistrate Jacques Pignolet was entrusted with an investigation 'against unknown persons' concerning 'forgery of documents and their use by an official in office'. The immediate cause for this is an official report drawn up against him by Duterme with the number 25.66.110879/97. Pignolet christened his dossier 231/97. This is the "antidote dossier", as it is called in judicial circles.

On August 26, 1997, when De Baets and his colleagues were evicted from the Neufchâteau cell, Commander Duterme sat down at his word processor at 10 am. The official report that will form the basis of the Pignolet investigation rolls out of the printer an hour later. The document is attached to the indictment opening the investigation, and the suspicion of 'forgery of documents' is based on it. On the cover page of Duterme's official report, 'the facts' are situated on July 2,

1997, at 9:00 a.m. That is the day and time when Duterme received the first rereading he directed. The PV then goes as follows: 'A document designated as N° Ant/256 of July 2 1997, issued by detectives of the Brussels Police Force - Neufchâteau branch, contains conclusions regarding the reading of investigation orders within this procedure. Studying this document leads me to conclude that the editors of certain reports have distorted the content of the interrogations of a person by presenting points that are not the truth and by omitting concrete and verified elements that contradict the statements made by this person. A material element, among others, is the following. The detective presents five photographs to a witness named 'X1'. One of these photographs shows the victim of the facts of file 64/85. The witness points to a photograph designated 'P10', a photograph without any resemblance to the victim. Not only is there no rubric in the record indicating that 'P 10' is not the victim, but subsequently, in the proceedings, there is no longer any such recognition...'*36

A big argument arises about other "discoveries" in the rereading and "the intention to do harm" that Duterme thought he detected in De Baets. Still, the essence remains situated in virtual reality. The reorientation of the X1 dossier, the dismissal of De Baets, the opening of a judicial investigation into alleged 'manipulation' of the X1 investigations... Everything rests on the first reread, specifically, the palaver around photo P10. All those involved in this case know perfectly well that the PV exists. Pignolet has been holding the PV in his hands since the first day of his investigation. He will then spend at least another year and a half trying to prove it does not exist. But in vain. The hair-splitting about the Pignolet dossier makes one forget that in the investigation into the murder of Christine Van Hees, also wholly independent of the statements of X1, there were severe indications in the direction of Marc Dutroux and Michel Nihoul. All of this was dutifully ignored. At the beginning of 1998, the competent magistrates maintained with a straight face that the investigations had run their 'normal course'. The Verwilghen Commission can only conclude that, since the dismissal of the De Baets team, the number of investigative acts in the Van Hees case alone is twenty times smaller than before. Still, the calculation gets lost in the small

print of its final report.*37 It later appears that the few official reports still being worked on are all part of the next phase of 'reading'.

NOTES:

1. Note from Commander Jean-Luc Duterme, BOB Brussels, December 19, 1996, ref.1903/96.
2. Duterme later carried out this threat. On October 4, 1998, the spokespersons of three gendarmerie unions stated that gendarmerie officers regularly settled accounts with their subordinates using false documents. They cite the Pirard case as the most manifest example. A few days later, they turned over their files to the Senate Committee on Internal Affairs, and Committee P was charged with investigating.
3. Those terms were described in an eight-page memo handed over to the Verwilghen Committee by detectives from the Neufchâteau cell. Several investigators told us that Commander Duterme uttered these historic words.
4. The note, entitled 'Synthèse relative à mon travail effectué à l'Antenne Neufchâteau' was handed over to Counselor Etienne Marique, acting for the commission, on 22 September 1997.
5. After remaining silent for a long time, De Baets gave interviews to the press in October 1998.
6. The second final report, commission-Verwilghen, chapter V, part 3, concludes.
7. These are the Dutch-language transcripts of the October 31 hearings, November 18 and 9, 10 and 11 December 1996. Duterme's writing is clearly identifiable on this. It is unknown to the authors whether Duterme also 'reads' other interrogation texts besides those they could obtain copies of.
8. 'It is not she who speaks!'
9. 'So here we find her, too.'
10. Note No. 0878 from Commander Jean-Luc Duterme to the Commander of the Brussels BOB, June 3, 1997.
11. Referred to as lawyer E.
12. Reading with comments of X1's statements, Brussels BOB, July 2 1997, Ant/256.
13. In the second final report of the commission, we read: 'So it is clear from all the documents that the Brussels

investigating judge has weighed very heavily, and in fact disproportionately, on the contact between the examining magistrate and some investigators.'

14. Letter from Jean-Claude Van Espen regarding 'dossier 64/85 - cell antenna-Neufchâteau', June 22 1997.
15. Note 286, Rudy Hoskens, BOB Brussels, July 14 1997. The note is addressed to Colonel Torrez, Major Guissard at Neufchâteau, the Commander of the CBO and Commander Duterme.
16. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, November 13 1996, PV 100.133.
17. National magistrates André Vandoren and Patrick Duynslaeger, public prosecutor Michel Bourlet, and CBO lieutenant Alexandre Michot followed the interrogation mainly from the video room. None of them noticed the possible 'suggestiveness' of the interrogation at that time.
18. Interrogation X1, Brussels BOB, November 13 1996, PV 100.133.
19. Interrogation X1, December 10 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 118.728.
20. Fax X1 to BOB Brussels, December 18 1996, PV 118.872.
21. De Morgen, 2 May 1998. Paule Somers read Walter De Bock and Koen Vidal's interview before its publication and agreed with the text as it appeared in the newspaper.
22. BOB Brussels, February 8, 1997, PV 150.093.
23. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, November 18 1996, PV 118.753.
24. Brussels BOB, December 6 1996, PV 117.487.
25. Expert report of witness X1, Professor Dr Paul Igodt, University Centre Salve Mater, KU Leuven, October 8 1997.
26. Brussels BOB, December 10, 1996, PV 118.324.
27. Brussels BOB, December 27, 1996, PV 119.168. The second part of the synthesis will follow on January 3, 1997.
28. The fax was added to the file on December 24, 1996. BOB Brussels, PV 118.877.
29. René Philippe Dawant, L'Enquête Manipulée. Les fausses pistes de l'affaire Dutroux, Luc Pire, 1998.
30. The book contains further 'updated' dialogues between X1 and her interrogators.
31. Controversy, Sunday, June 14, 1998, RTL-TV.

32. This is a meagre consolation. Reisinger is charged with "falsification of documents", and the newspaper La Dernière Heure goes so far as to accuse him of paedophilia.
33. Letter from examining magistrate Langlois to Major Guissard (gendarmerie Neufchâteau) and Commander Dutorme (BOB Brussels), 11 July 1997.
34. Paul Vanden Boeynants said a few weeks later in an interview, 'I now do politics as a journalist in the satirical weekly Pan. That is much easier.' Financieel-Economische Tijd 4 October 1997.
35. Letter from investigating judge Langlois to Commander Dutorme, September 2, 1997. The letter is quoted in the second final report of the Verwilghen Commission, chapter V, part 2.
36. Statement Jean-Luc Dutorme, BOB Brussels, August 26, 1997, BR.25.66.110879/97.
37. Second final report of the Verwilghen commission, chapter V, part 2.

2. 'At the time of writing this report, the rereading has still not been completed.'

Verwilghen Committee on the re-reading that ended eleven days earlier, February 16, 1998

`The re-reading does not imply that the investigators keep their arms crossed during the additional reading of the minutes of the witness's hearings. The re-reading also includes the investigation and verification of the material evidence. At the time of writing, the re-reading was still ongoing, whereas,

in September, the re-reading team announced several times that everything would be re-read by October, mid-December, and then by the end of February. The dates coincide with the originally planned end dates of the work of the parliamentary committee of inquiry.*1

Even though it never got to see a `report of re-reading, the Verwilghen Commission has obviously retained a great interest in it. At the beginning of 1997, investigating judge Jacques Langlois made it clear to the committee Commission that something huge was about to happen in the so-called X files. His words prompted the commission to launch a separate investigation into the alleged protection of `Dutroux, Nihoul and consorts'. Some committee members, therefore, were uncomfortable with the repeated postponement of the completion of the `reading'. Others, such as PS Member of Parliament Claude Eerdeken, insisted that the final report clearly stated that they have every confidence in the expertise of the re-readers.

The committee could never properly judge the widely discussed `synthesis reports from re-reading. Probably, the members did not even know how many reports there were. All these reports are made public for the first time in this book. There are four reports in total. The first, already covered in the previous chapter, is nothing more than a prologue. Whereas in the first report, only three randomly chosen interrogations of X1 were examined, in the three subsequent ones, all interrogations are reviewed one by one. Those who want to get an objective view of the rise and fall of the X1 files must stick with us. There is a torrent of details involved, and always quite subtle details. It is important to note that the accumulation of these details was the main argument for closing the investigations into the Dutroux affair.

The first striking observation about the re-readings is that, as might have been feared, the committee had allowed itself to be considerably misled. Contrary to what was stated in the second final report, the re-readings were completed when the commission concluded its work on February 16, 1998. The last of the four reports were sent to Commander Duterme in Brussels and Major Guissard in Neufchâteau on February 5,

eleven days earlier.*2 There is a second misconception. It relates to what "re-reading" truly entails. Little or nothing, it soon becomes apparent. Most of the "findings" listed in the report were not made by the readers but by their colleagues at the Gent BOB or, earlier, by the investigators in Adjutant De Baets' team. Apart from a few exceptions, the re-readers have limited their activities to reproducing and reinterpreting existing data. Looking at the last three reports, it is difficult to imagine, with the best will in the world, that this could have taken more than five months.

When Chief Superintendent Dernicourt announced the completion of the second report at the end of October 1997, he explained the situation in a separate memo: 'To date, nine interrogations could be analysed in detail according to a cadence of one interrogation per week.' Let's do the math. If the re-reading started at the end of August at that tempo, it is logical that at the end of October, nine weeks and thus nine interrogations have happened. Since there are seventeen hearings in total to be re-read, the work could have been completed eight weeks later, i.e. by December 31.

Miraculously, that deadline applies to the Verwilghen Commission when Dernicourt writes his note. However, the committee will be given an extra month and a half, and look: so will the re-readers. Between the re-readings 2 and 3, a period of about two and a half months will pass, about 10 weeks. Re-reading 3, however, deals with only four hearings, not ten. This 'extra time' could be explained if it concerns extra-long interrogations which require complex verifications. But that is just not the case. It involves the four short X1 interrogations held in December 1996 after X1 had complained about the lengthy nightly interrogations at the BOB.

The memo which appointed Duterme as chief proofreader, Dernicourt, sent to the investigative leaders on October 27, 1997, is a kind of guide to the three reports that will follow. Dernicourt describes how 'out of concern for objectivity and independence, two separate investigative teams are re-reading the original Dutch interrogations', 'intending to objectify the witness's statements'. And here's the good news: Dutch-speaking BOB officers are also involved in the re-reading this time. The first team is led by First Sergeant Eddy Verhaegen,

who took over De Baets' role as interrogator of X1. The second team consists of First Sergeant Willy Vandeput and Cerefino Alvarez. This duo read the dossiers and reviewed the video recordings of the interrogations to verify the accuracy of transcripts and translations. Sergeant Bart Ooms, for his part, checked the faxes that X1 sent to the BOB and created tables in which he compared and juxtaposed the various statements on the same facts. First Sergeants Patrick Noller and Joël Gérard, co-authors of the first re-reading, are again present. They will take a closer look at the old and new Van Hees dossiers. In his note, Dernicourt leaves no room for doubt about how things are going: 'The anomalies already indicated in the report of revision Ant/256 of 02.07.97 seem to be confirmed. Namely, the interrogations were steered (by the investigators), and the questions were sometimes suggestive. The witness exploited this conduct to answer questions.'*3

Dernicourt does not provide examples to support this claim in his note. He does dwell at length on the date the Neufchâteau cell learned that Bernard Weinstein was in a French prison on February 13 1984, the date of the murder of Christine Van Hees. Since X1 stated that he was present at the time of the murder, proof emerges here that she was either lying or fantasising at one point. This fact, says Dernicourt -and no one will dispute this- is very important in assessing her credibility. According to Dernicourt, De Baets and his colleagues deliberately concealed the existence of this 'alibi set in concrete' for as long as possible. Only because they wanted to preserve X1's credibility at all costs and against their better judgment. In the eyes of Dernicourt, First Sergeant Michel Clippe, one of De Baets' confidants, was responsible for this. At the end of February 1997, he had been in contact with Jean-Claude Schmit of the BOB of Bastogne, who had requested the exact dates of Weinstein's detention and penitentiary leave from Interpol in France.*4

Clippe knew that Weinstein had an alibi but failed to report it, claims Dernicourt. In re-reading the proceedings, he came across a report in which First Sergeant Rudy Hoskens, on June 18, 1997, more than three months after the information from Bastogne, mentions 'a complementary request for information to Interpol France. Hoskens, chief of the first team, thus

pretended not to know yet that Weinstein was in prison. 'While the answer to that question had long been known', said Dernicourt, who here seems to render any further discussion about the good faith of the dismissed detectives redundant. The magistrates who get to see the re-reading can count themselves lucky that this apparent deception was uncovered. They failed to check whether their perspective of foul play was valid. And what does it turn out to be? It is not valid.

Dernicourt himself, somewhere in his note, provides the impetus for clarifying the mystery. Referring to the exact dates of detention and leave of Weinstein, he writes: 'At the time of the coordination meetings at that time, this information circulated within our teams.' So how could Dernicourt have known that? 'Because I voiced it loud and clear during a meeting,' Michel Clippe responds. 'I immediately raised the alarm that Weinstein might have been on leave on the day of Christine Van Hees' murder. This seemed to me to be an enormously important fact; it goes without saying.' So why didn't he draw up an official report so that investigating judge Van Espen, for example, could have officially been made aware of this? 'Van Espen didn't attend those meetings,' says Clippe. 'And that didn't even matter. We had been waiting impatiently for those dates for weeks and were told that the BOB of Bastogne would deal with this. I knew a guy there and called him. He gave me the dates and said he would add his report to the dossier of the investigating judge Gérard in Neufchâteau. He would subsequently make a copy available to Van Espen. That was the agreement. I could hardly draw up a report to report that my colleague had drawn up a report, could I? The only thing I could do was to alert everyone and tell them that a report would soon be coming from Bastogne. And that's what I did.'*5

The crux of the matter remains: Weinstein was in prison and could not have been present at the murder. When the Brussels investigating judge Pignolet gets involved in the Weinstein saga, Clippe meets him to explain the facts. The now ex-detective tells him what happened: 'I contacted the 1OWM Schmit, who gave me the different leave dates (minimum of a week) over the phone. He specified that the weekend leaves had yet to be confirmed and was still awaiting a response. He

explained to me that the searches took a long time since the French system was not yet computerised, and he had to write to all the prisons where Weinstein was held (...).'*6

What do we learn from this? Investigators knew that in early March 1997, Weinstein was granted leave for five days or more. The dates when he was given a weekend off are ...unknown. Now, suppose that Weinstein was granted leave on the morning of Saturday, February 11, 1984. Then, it might be far-fetched to assume that he would have immediately travelled to Brussels. The idea becomes a little less outlandish in the knowledge that when Weinstein was finally released at the end of 1985, he immediately settled in Brussels. He apparently knew people there. Prisoners very often return too late from penitentiary leave. Marc Dutroux once stayed away for a week. When this happens, the same fate awaits them as soldiers in the army: the next leave is revoked. When you analyse the dates of Weinstein's leave, it suddenly seems like the devil is involved. Weinstein received his first five days of leave on May 5, 1983.*7 From then on, a cycle of five days of leave every three months commences. This cycle is interrupted once: in mid-1984. So, something might have happened in the first few months of 1984. For example, Weinstein might have returned to prison late after a furlough on the weekend of February 11 and 12, 1984. Then Weinstein's 'solid alibi' is destined for the bin.

Of course, it is and remains conjecture. However, based on the information available to the X1 investigators in the spring of 1996, it makes perfect sense that they would seek clarity. It would have been neglectful if they had not inquired further, which is precisely what Rudy Hoskens did on June 18, 1997, tired of waiting. In his fax to Interpol, contested by Dernicourt, he states very clearly, for those who did not already know, that Weinstein was in prison from February 11, 1976, to November 6, 1985, but asks whether he can be informed of 'the penitentiary leaves between September 1983 and March 1984 in detail.'*8 How can Dernicourt claim that 'the answer to this question was already known'? In reality, there is still no answer to this day. Based on the nota- Dernicourt, Van Espen assumed at the end of 1997 that everything about Weinstein's penitentiary leave is already known. Therefore, there is no further information. The data with which this part of the

investigation was concluded is contained in an official report, added to the Van Hees file by First Sergeant Joël Gérard, one of the re-readers, on October 16 1997. The report contains a 'complete overview', lacking any mention of "weekends off". Conclusion: one of the strongest arguments against the testimony of X1 is suddenly questionable. Bernard Weinstein has absolutely no watertight alibi for the murder of Christine Van Hees. Maybe he does have one, but in any case, it has not been thoroughly checked out. Again, it starts well. On the penultimate day of October, there it is, the second report of re-reading:

Brussels, 30.10.97.

Synthesis and comments after re-reading the proceedings and revision of the filmed interrogations, up to and including the ninth.

(...) As a result of a remark on the content of this report concerning the domicile of Nihoul in 1982 in the Atrebatenstraat, we establish that during this period, Nihoul frequented a private club in this street. Nevertheless, the apartment recognised by X1 is in the Atrebatenstraat number 124, and the club frequented by Nihoul is located at number 145 on the same street (...). This synthesis confirms the observations made in the synthesis of interrogations 1 to 5 regarding the facts and elements brought forward by X1.*9

We can record, for example:

A) The detectives obtained elements of information outside the interrogations.

B) X1 contradicts herself.

1) In her chronology. For example, the dates of her births and any murders.

2) In the account of the facts, for example, regarding the perpetrators, the victims, and the modus operandi.

C) X1 demonstrates her enormous difficulties in recognising perpetrators or possible victims by means of a photograph. For example, she is never formal in designating victims or perpetrators; she can never give surnames or first names unless the investigators reveal the identity of the person in question. She regularly designates new perpetrators or victims outside the framework of the photos shown to her.

D) X1 manipulates the investigators by using the information they provide her, and she restores her 'reconstructed truth' to them. For example, in the version of the facts, the identification of the individuals is done after the presentation of photographs. Or even on the details she provides. In fact, she supplies only unverifiable data, especially in the description of perpetrators and victims. She can recognise 'the voice' or 'the way of moving'. She is so vague that we can never situate the facts she describes in space or time.

E) X1 uses information that then turns out to be false to reconstruct her memory. For example, the designation of Nihoul's apartment at 124 rue Atrebaten (where he was neither domiciled nor living before 1984) or the identification of individuals after the presentation of photographs who would have been 6 or 7 years old at the time of the facts (1982).

F) X1 recounts facts about victims, including their first names, who can all be identified as belonging to her close circle—for example, Samy, Katia, and Natania.

G) X1 uses information on situations where 'one of her friends' was a victim to reconstruct her own history. For example, X1 tells us of a certain 'Jacky, the tattooed one' as the perpetrator of the facts. Jacky is the alleged perpetrator of a sexual assault on the named Katia D.S., a classmate of X1. We specify that this Jacky does indeed have a tattoo—summary of interrogations 6 to 9.

Hearing 6 on date of 06.11.1996:

This interrogation is based on an event regarding a second murder in a factory. X1 situates this event a week after the first murder, about which she speaks in interrogation 5. She situates this murder between November and December 1982.

The factory was located by the detectives and identified by X1. (...)

On 31.10.1996, X1 handed over a letter concerning the murder of Cheyenne to the investigators. It is the subject of this interrogation (06.11.1996).

X1 thinks that the victim (a girl) of this fact was her child. According to her words, the child was about 2 and a half years old and had brown curly hair and brown eyes.

Comments:

1. During a previous interrogation, X1 stated that she gave birth to a boy for the first time on 16.06.1983.

2. The detectives show several photographs of persons quoted in the Dauphin file, in which X1 pointed out 5 of them as perpetrators who were not involved in the second murder at the factory. Among these 5 is W, of whom she knows neither the surname nor the first name until the investigators mention it. He is the only one of whom she states that he was present at the second murder in the factory. She did not mention this person in her letter to the detectives on 31.10.1996. Moreover, in her letter, X1 speaks of three gendarmes but does not mention them in her filmed interrogation of 06.11.1996.

Hearing 7 on the date of 13.11.1996:

X1 informs us of a fact she situated in 1980 with Marc Dutroux's dogs in an apartment owned by Nihoul.

This interrogation is based on a fact concerning the murder of Christine Van Hees. She situates this fact between late 1981 and early 1982.

Comments:

1. After several photographs were presented to her, X1 does not recognise Christine Van Hees. She points to a photo of Anik D. as being Christine.

2. The investigators show her 4 of the 8 photographs used within the framework of the recognition of Carine Dellaert and Véronique D., to which they add the picture of Christine Van Hees.

3. It is clear that the detectives knew the object of the interrogation before it began. It is also true that the connection with the Van Hees dossier had already been made, whereas up to that moment, the procedure did not authorise them to do so.

Hearing 8 on the date of 18.11.1996:

This interrogation is based on the facts regarding the murder of Christine Van Hees and is more in-depth.

Comments:

1. X1 refuses to look again at the series of photographs presented to her during the previous interrogation and later confirms having recognised Christine during the designation of the picture. X1 adds that she had already recognised her in the series presented to her, in which she pointed out Dellaert and D. (interrogation of 25.10.1996 nr

4). We note that Van Hees' photo was not in this series, but that Anik D was among them. Thus, she confirms that Anik D was Christine.

2. The questions confirmed that the detectives knew some aspects of the Christine Van Hees file.

3. X1 mentions many contradictions in her account of the same fact compared to her previous interrogation. We remark that the detectives have been in possession of a photograph of Christine Van Hees since 29.10.1996 (cf. official report no. 117.545196).

Hearing 9 on the date of 30.11.1996:

X1 recognises a house located at Legevoordestraat 32 in Waarschoot as being the place where Clo (Carine Dellaert) was murdered.

X1 relates the fact about the murder of Clo.

X1 confirms her recognition of the factory (...).

X1 identifies, after the exhibit of photos, the Fat One, the Thin One and the Watchdog as present during the second murder in the factory.

Comments:

1. The designated house at 32 Legevoordestraat was, at the time of the facts (1982), occupied by individuals not linked to the case. Indeed, G D did not reside at this address until 1991 as a partner in the firm L. This firm went bankrupt a few months after it was founded.

2. X1 mentions many contradictions in her account of the murder of Clo told during her interrogations 4 (25.10.1996) and 5 (30.10.1996).

3. When presenting the photographs between which she recognises the Fat One, the Thin One and the Watchdog, X1 points out two individuals born in 1976 and, therefore, six years old at the time of the facts. They are François C. and Shpetim K.

Conclusions:

We establish that the elements that the investigators introduce in their questions are used again by X1 to reconstruct 'her truth', manoeuvring them in the process. It is, therefore, very difficult to distinguish between the events that really happened and those she reconstructed based on information provided by the investigators or information she picked up from her immediate surroundings. As a result, we performed an analysis, taking

the elements of all the interrogations and her various writings again at that stage of the investigation, which we show in the attached tables.

Problems with the procedure:

We note that not all the information transmitted by X1 is in the proceedings. For example, she shared certain writings and information verbally. We are faced with the problem of not knowing how the investigators arrived at the files of the murders of Carine Dellaert, Véronique D. and Christine Van Hees.

We face a situation where photographs of individuals are presented without us knowing how they arrived in our dossier. In fact, no prior correlation has been established, and X1 has put forward no reasons to go down these tracks. Regarding Christine Van Hees, we found an official report dated 02.01.1997, in which it is said that a correlation was discovered with Christine Van Hees due to X1's statements. We note that X1's statements were not recorded in writing. We are also confronted with the fact that photographs of individuals within the framework of the second murder in the factory are presented without knowing where these photographs come from and why these photographs were chosen.

We are likewise faced with the problem of not knowing how to locate the factory (...). We find no trace of an explanation for any of these questions.*10

Vandeput W, Verhaegen E., Ooms B., Alvarez C.,
For agreement, Dernicourt B. 1MDC *11

What does all this teach us? There are ways to deliver a concise message in a meandering way so that no one will even bother to ask a question about it. As you read through the second re-read, you might be tempted to nod in agreement, thinking: it sounds all very plausible, but that conclusion is wrong. The most striking case of information forgery is at the forefront this time. X1 has indicated a house in the Atrebatenstraat 124 in Etterbeek and says that Nihoul lived there between 1982 and 1984. Not true, say the re-readers. 'He was not domiciled' at number 124. And: 'He did not live there before 1984 either'. That's how it says it word for word.

On October 30 1996, Michel Nihoul himself - a privileged witness in this case - was questioned about this. He says: 'I indeed cohabited two years, from 1982 to 1984, with Marleen De Cockere in the Atrebatenstraat 124.'*12

De Cockere is also adamant during her interrogation that she lived in the Atrebatenstraat 124 during that period and that Nihoul moved in with her.*13 The only ones who think differently are the re-readers.

The data they rely on comes from a report prepared a year earlier by members of the De Baets team. So, it was not the work of the readers themselves. The report lists all the addresses where Nihoul was domiciled. It appears that he only registered in the Atrebatenstraat 124 on October 23, 1986. The police report also states that as of November 12, 1979, he was domiciled' in the Troonstraat 16 in Brussels and was 'officially de-registered on February 17, 1984.*14 This means that the district police officer came to check whether Nihoul was still living there and established that this was no longer the case. But when exactly did Nihoul move out? Long before February 17, 1984, as it turns out. Because that was only the endpoint of the deregistration procedure. Nihoul incurred debts here and there during that time. On April 27, 1983, a private investigator commissioned a report on him by one of the creditors of his small company, United Corporation. Nihoul had an outstanding debt of 94,314 francs since 1973. The bank wanted its money back and commissioned a search to find out where the darn Nihoul could be domiciled. Behold the detective's findings: 'Nihoul Michel - This person has moved into the ground floor at 16 Troon State for professional use but is no longer living there. He has been proposed for removal from office since 11/2/83. The former owner, Mme Lannoye-Peten (...), has no idea where he may have gone.'*15 The first official report that Nihoul no longer lives in the Troonstraat thus dates back to February 11, 1983.

Under item F, the re-readers then point out that they have found three of X1's listed first names of fellow victims - Samy, Katia and Natania - 'in her immediate vicinity'. According to the re-readers, these are former schoolmates of X1. If it turns out that during her interrogations, she would have concealed the fact that these youngsters were in the same school as her,

this could indeed be a reason to toss the entire X1 dossier in the bin. Now, let us see what X1 has stated about Samy. She talks about him during the interrogation on December 9, 1996:

- Samy, Samy... Was he from Ghent, too, that little Turk?
- Yes, a Turk.
- He was also from the same school?
- He was also in the same school... That's weird, huh? We didn't know that about each other.*16

The re-readers did not discover the Samy mentioned by X1, but the Ghent BOB did. His name is Sami A, and he is indeed of Turkish origin. Also, Natania DB must be the same person as the one described by X1. X1 did not claim verbatim that Natania attended the same school, but when she first brought her up, she did mention someone from 'our gang'. That passage followed an explanation of how high school girls from Ghent were recruited for sex parties.*17

So, the re-readers add a third person to this list: Katia DS, a former classmate of X1. Unlike Sami and Natania, Katia is a prevalent first name in Flanders. X1 mentioned a girl with that first name she saw murdered while living in Knokke. The number of high schools where not a single girl named Katia was enrolled in the 1980s must be minimal. That Katia DS must, by definition, be the same Katia as the girl X1 spoke of during her fifth interrogation on October 31 1996, therefore, seems a rather gratuitous proposition.

Entirely separate from this, the interrogation of Katia DS - by the Ghent BOB - is quite interesting. She can vaguely remember X1 and selects X1's picture from a set of portraits presented to her. Before pointing out the photograph of X1, she grabs another picture of a girl without explaining. It is the photo of Carine Dellaert. For some reason, Katia DS saw a correlation between these two girls. The re-readers do not say a word about this. Katia DS also told the Ghent BOB officers that as a teenager, she was raped in a room on the second floor above a café in the Boudewijnstraat in Ghent.*18 X1 also talked about that café and said she often went there with 'Clo' and sometimes with classmates. It is undoubtedly intriguing that Katia DS was in the same class as X1. Why that should

inevitably lead to the firm conclusion that X1 drew inspiration from her own 'environment' must rest on a secret known only to re-readers.

But what about Sami and Natania? For re-readers who pretend not to 'sit with their arms crossed', it cannot be an insurmountable task to interrogate these two individuals. It would only be genuinely enlightening if, on hearing X1's account, they burst out laughing. The re-readers do not even have to go to Ghent. The Ghent BOB had already contacted Sami and Natania. And with this result, according to the official report:

Natania DB was very suspicious of us. She always asked why we had contacted her. She denied even the most obvious things, being her relationship with MB and her trips to Turkey and India. Several photos were presented to her, but she could not identify anyone (...). Natania DB is a girl who lives one hundred per cent in the hippie style, possibly explaining her suspicion of our involvement. Our department invited Sami A, but up to now, we have not been able to locate him.*19

The re-readers do not mention these reactions at all. X1 mentioned dozens of names of fellow victims. Of these, only two have been positively identified with certainty. One is so scared that she would even deny that she is a human being; the

other one never established contact. So this is what the Ghent prosecutor Jean Soenen is referring to when he states during a press conference a few months later: 'All the names of girls whom Regina Louf allegedly knew in her sex circuit were found by the police services to be old schoolmates and classmates.'

Have the re-readers done nothing but transcribe -and not even transcribe correctly- the PVs of their colleagues? They did. They found the rapist of Katia DS in the gendarmerie archives, a certain individual named Jacky B. Dernicourt and Sergeant Yves Dhainaut found police photographs of him naked above the waist. They show how the man has tattoos all over his body

- precisely as X1 described one of those present during the murder of Christine Van Hees.*20 They conclude that X1 must have 'inspired' her story on the adventures of her classmate. That could be, of course, but what they do not mention in their reports is that this same classmate also seems to know something about Carine Dellaert. Jacky B was convicted of multiple burglaries and rapes. You would think that detectives discovering all this would immediately make obvious connections. Not so in the X1-dossier in the fall of 1997. Even the most apparent investigative act, checking whether his path could have crossed Carine Dellaert's, was not considered.

In the same vein, the language of the re-readers becomes almost euphoric when they can report that two of the eight men X1 identified during her interrogation on November 30, 1996, were born in 1976. However, this is nothing new. All those involved in these proceedings know that this fact had already been acknowledged by the interrogators almost a year earlier.

What is remarkable about the second synthesis report is that it includes the interrogations of 13 and 18 November 1996. These were already the subject of the first re-reading. Logically, the main arguments of the Ant/256 report - suggestive questions about the way the victim was tied up, the age of Mieke, questions that X1 would have refused to answer, and an evolution in the motive for the murder... - should return here. They don't. The re-readers make off with sayings like 'previous findings are confirmed'. Only one argument is explored further: photo P 10. There is now no mention of the 'non-preparation of a report'. Possibly, the re-readers had discovered for themselves by now that the official report, which they claimed did not exist, did exist after all. They take a different approach. They have looked again at the photos shown to X1 on 13 and 18 November 1996. They establish that both interrogations focussed on the same set of five pictures: one of Christine Van Hees - of course - and four that had already been used once before during the interrogation of October 25, when X1 had to point out 'Clo'.

On November 13, we now know that X1 argued with her interrogators for hours because she would not look at the photo.

Near the end of the interview, at seven in the morning, she finally pointed out photo P10. We know that this was not Christine Van Hees, but a certain Anik D. When she first looked at the five pictures presented to her, she did say that Kristien was 'among the pictures', but she would not or could not point out the correct photo. Later, she said: If you could watch the videotape of the interview, you would see that after pointing out picture P10, I looked at De Baets and Hupez with a triumphant look. Like: and now you! I wanted to make it clear to them that I meant it when I said I wanted to go home. I was furious with them at the time.' So, if we are to believe X1, on November 13, she did know which was the right photo, but she didn't want to point it out of a way of protesting against her enquirers.

X1 didn't know Christine Van Hees' picture at all, the re-readers argue. Their argument is based on a separate official report that Dernicourt added to the file on October 10, 1997. In it, he notes that on November 18 1996, X1 was presented with the same photos as on November 13 and that she then 'confirmed' that photo P10 showed the face of 'Kristien'. Dernicourt concludes this from a well-defined passage of which he quotes 'the exact version' in his official report. Here it is:

- May we ask you to take another look at the photos from last week with a final effort?
- I know I've seen her...
- What?
- I know I've seen her (picture), but...
- Last week, she was still in the photos that you saw. Was Kristien in the pictures?
- I can remember it, though. I saw her when I looked for Clo. Wasn't she in (the set of pictures) too? I do not remember. I don't want to see them again, actually. Don't do it to me again.*21

This is Dernicourt's discovery: the photograph of Anik D (P 10) was already in the set used on October 25 1996. When X1 now says that she saw Kristien even then - 'if I looked for Clo' - this

might mean that in her view, Anik D has always been 'Kristien'. Christine Van Hees was not among the pictures shown on October 25. Anik D's was. Here, even the most passionate believer of X's testimony could give in. If the so-called key witness could not even recognise the victim's picture and, on the contrary, quite firmly points to the wrong girl, what is she? That is what the authors initially thought, too. This book was written initially partly in Dutch and partly in French. This required a careful review of the quotes to be translated. And by doing so, we discovered it. This is what we found in the PV with the original verbatim transcription of the interrogation of November 18. Read and compare:

- May we ask you to take another look at the photos from last week with a final effort?
- Oh... oh... Not that I saw them, but...
- What?
- Not that I saw them, but...
- Last week she was in the photos that you saw. Was Kristien in the pictures?
- I remember so, anyway. I had seen them anyway when I searched Clo, and she was not among them either. I don't remember. I don't want to see them again, don't do it to me.*22

This passage is completely different in three aspects from the one quoted by Dernicourt in his PV of October 10 1997. In the original PV, X1 says twice in succession: 'Not that I saw them, but...' Dernicourt changes that twice to: 'I know I saw them.' A mistake from Dernicourt? No, because he goes on. In the original transcription, X1 says: 'And she wasn't among them either.' That is as clear as it gets: Kristien was NOT in the pile they showed her on October 25. In the Dernicourt version, this becomes: 'Wasn't she there either?'

Could it be that Dernicourt re-examined the videotape and determined that the text of the original transcription differed from what was actually said? If this had been the case, then undoubtedly, this observation would have been mentioned all over the reports of re-reading. Two re-readers do nothing for five months but study the transcripts based on the videos.

They do not say a single word about errors in transcribing this crucial passage. Besides, it is not plausible that the author of the original transcription would have forgotten the word 'not' up to three times.

But what are the implications of those few altered words? Anyone who reads the original will notice that X1 also says somewhere in there, 'I've seen them anyway.' What does she actually mean by that? Is she not saying here, too, that she 'already saw' Kristien on October 25? Not at all. Everything revolves around one little word: she. X1 does not use this word in the sense of 'she' (Kristien) but as an indication of a stack of photographs. She had already seen the four Ghent photos when she had to point them out to Clo and now says, logically, 'I've seen them anyway'. Hence, the equally logical addition: 'She wasn't among them either.' This actually means nothing else than that photo P10 for her certainly does not depict 'Kristien'. Dernicourt has transformed this last, all-embracing sentence into a question. To prove the opposite of what actually happened. No discussion is possible.

What prompted him to do this? One conceivable explanation: Dernicourt claimed in the first re-read that De Baets and Hupez never drew up a report about the non-recognition of Christine Van Hees by X1. By mid-October, Dernicourt must have already known that this made no sense. If he did not want to become embroiled in a lawsuit with his colleagues, he had to find something about picture P10 and present it so that nobody would bet a penny on the good faith of De Baets, Hupez and X1. He could assume that the Brussels magistrates would never notice this. After all, they are French-speaking.

This is a forgery by an officer of the judicial police, someone who has sworn to report the truth and nothing but the truth to the judiciary. Let us not forget that Dernicourt is the head of the re-reading team.

There is another conclusion to be drawn that touches the very foundations of the Brussels X1 case: Regina Louf was always right. She never complained afterwards that the girl in photo P10 looked a bit like Christine Van Hees, not even after the Flemish weekly Knack on June 3, 1998, quoted the official report in Dernicourt's version. She always stuck to her first

and only version: 'I pointed out the wrong picture because I was fed up with it'.

One can no longer maintain that she did not recognise Christine Van Hees's photograph. The whole argumentation to prove this - and which lay at the basis of the closing of the X1 association to the Van Hees file - is entirely in tatters. Now that we know how the investigation was falsified, her emotional reaction to the first sight of Christine Van Hees' photograph again becomes the most important objective measure. The words of Adjudant De Baets are suddenly not so far-fetched anymore: 'She immediately turned the paper over. She didn't want to look at that photo. She had told us Kristien was in it but didn't want to look at her face. That was on November 13, the very first time. It was clear to us that she had recognised the girl immediately.'

Does it make any sense to continue the re-reading of the re-reading? Why not? Who knows what we might come across next?

During her interrogation on October 25 1996, X1 says that 'Clo' was killed in a villa, which she describes in detail. One month later, on November 30, she shows the investigators the route to this villa in Waarschoot. The De Baets team's investigation reveals a business connection between an occupant of this villa and a bar along the Drongensesteenweg in Ghent, about which X1 says she was raped there. The bar, Co-Cli-Co, was operated by a later occupant of this villa. The re-reader noted that this man, a certain GD, only turned up at the address in Waarschoot in 1991.

Apart from the fact that the re-readers have once again plagiarised already months-old determinations of the De Baets team, their reasoning shows a kind of deliberate short-sightedness. Neither X1 nor the detectives have ever claimed that GD was running the bar and living in Waarschoot in the same period. One could only infer that a business relationship existed. The bar was in Ghent, the house in Waarschoot. How could X1 know this?

Also, in the Waarschoot passage, the re-readers alter reality. They state that the house in Waarschoot was inhabited in 1982 'by persons alien to the dossier'. Strange. All those who know

the dossier a little are aware that the house next door was occupied in the early 1980s by the parents of...witness X4. From the Ghent PV, which lists the entire history of the house designated by X1,

it appears that since 1971 - and until today - it has been owned by the same family.*23 The same family that rented the place to GD in 1991. In the way the re-reader now presents it, it sounds as if GD and his firm have been engaged in nothing but respectable activities in Waarschoot. That differs from the impression we got from talking to the gardener when we visited the site. The man has his own business and is responsible for the maintenance of several gardens in the region, including this one. He is shocked when it appears that Regina Louf's testimonies are the reason for our arrival. If she points out that house, there must be something to what she says,' says the man. 'In the early nineties, a clandestine private club existed in that house. On the outside, you could see nothing to indicate that it was, in fact, a brothel. Yet that's what it was. Here in the neighbourhood, everyone knew that. Things were wild there, I can tell.' A neighbour tells the same story: 'It was called International Club or something like that. It was something discreet. At night, these very fancy cars were always parked on the driveway.'*24

This was the situation in the early 1990s; the gardener was adamant. According to X1, Carine Dellaert was murdered here in 1982 or '83. The dates don't add up unless the relationship between GD and the owner stretches further back in history. That could be an interesting hypothesis, but one that was never investigated. After this second report of re-reading, what are we left with regarding indications that the X1 investigation is vacuous? Nothing. Reviewing everything will show that no argument in the second synthesis report passes the reality test.

The third synthesis report bears the date of December 17, 1997, but was not transmitted to the inquiry leaders until January 12, 1998. It is possible that the re-readers hoped for a while that the committee would stick to its final date, December 31, and waited a little longer to forward their report than the excuse of a drawn-out year-end leave could justify.

The third re-read is nevertheless the most interesting of the four. In it, for the first time, some minor observations are made that allow the credibility of X1 to be questioned. On the other hand, without realising it, the re-readers in this document draw attention to something that could pass for proof that X1 must have known Christine Van Hees. The small detail, one short sentence only, has not been noticed by anyone until now: by no investigator or magistrate.

Brussels, 17.12.97.

Synthesis and comments after re-reading the proceedings and revision of the filmed interrogations, from 10 to 13. This synthesis confirms the findings of the two previous syntheses regarding the facts and elements brought forward by X1.

Observations:

We have performed certain verifications due to the tasks mentioned in the previous synthesis.

- As a result of searches to identify X1's child, named Cheyenne, murdered during a sex party in a factory, we were able to establish that this (infrequent) first name is found in X1's immediate vicinity. C V, a cleaning lady in the hair salon of X1's parents, does indeed have a daughter named Cheyenne.*25
- As for X1's absences from school, we have established that during the 1983-1984 school year, X1 was absent on 26.10.1983 and 14.05.1984. This assignment is the subject of PV 118.222/96 on 20.12.1996.
- As for the identification of the named Jacky the tattooed, we have identified a person with the same countenance and tattoos as described by X1. This person is called Jacques B. The person is known to our department for sexually assaulting a classmate of X1.
- Concerning the occupation of the house at Legevoordestaat 32 (former 20A) in Waarschoot, it has been confirmed that the name GD could only occupy it when company L had its registered office there. This company, where GD was a shareholder for a nominal 1,000 francs, had its installations at this address from 01.02.1991 to 30.04.1991. GD was domiciled at this address from 27.11.1990 to 12.04.1991. These findings

are the subject of the official report 152.460/97 dated 10.10.1997.

Concerning interrogations 10 to 13, we can establish, for example:

A) These four interrogations were conducted within a very short period, from 09.12.1996 to 15.12.1996. Their purpose was to obtain more details about the murder of Christine Van Hees. These interrogations were conducted within the framework of the dossier 64/85.

B) After reading these four interrogations, we can conclude:

- Continuity of the contradictions already mentioned in our two previous syntheses.
- X1 uses the information given to her in the content of the questions and presents them as if they were the truth.
- Upon verification, the details she provided during these interrogations turned out to be incorrect or impossible.

C) We increasingly find that X1 speaks about facts about victims; she gives us the first names and names of those we find in her immediate surroundings.

D) At each interrogation, X1 adds either new individuals or new facts in relation to her previous statements.

Conclusions:

The detectives who participated in the interrogation also established all the abovementioned elements. In fact, during interrogations No. 12 on 11. 12.1996 and No. 13 on 15.12.1996, the detectives made X1 remark that her statements 'do not make sense' and contradicted the previous summary of the contents of interrogations 10 to 13.

Hearing 10 on date of 09.12.1996:

- This interrogation is taxed on Christine Van Hees's contacts. X1 gives us details about Van Hees' girlfriends who allegedly participated in sex parties that took place in a house near Welriekende Dreef, to which Nihoul had the key. She also gives verifiable details, such as objects, songs, clothes, etc...

- She tells of new facts about sex parties that would have taken place in the presence of Van Hees in a villa with a swimming pool located in Brussels.
- After presenting various photographic files to identify the perpetrators, X1 pointed out several who had not been identified to date.
- The same set of photographs was submitted to her again to identify Christine Van Hees.
- She is then shown photographs of Christine Van Hees taken in a place that could not be identified at this stage of the investigation.

Observations:

1. In terms of verifiable details, we have been able to establish that X1 speaks to us about the following:

a) A teddy bear that Nihoul allegedly gave to Christine Van Hees and about which X1 gives us the following details: it concerns a little bear, 'Heart to Heart' by the toy shop chain Christiaensen, of which the heart beats when one shakes it. While searching the objects seized during a search at X1's residence, we found a red 'Heart to Heart' label in a photo album, with a handwritten mention specifying that this bear was given to X1 by her fiancé at the time. These findings are the subject of the official report 152.461/97 dated 29.10.1997.

b) a bicycle about which X1 gives us the following description. It is a large black Dutch-style bicycle. Regarding the bike and the teddy bear, Van Hees' parents, as well as a large number of persons from her surroundings, were questioned on this point. None of them confirmed that Christine Van Hees ever possessed such objects. These observations are the subject of the official report 152.536/97 dated 13.11.1997.

c) X1 also states that the song "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" was very much enjoyed by the group Christine belonged to and that it was played during the 'meetings' in the apartment. From searches we have carried out, it appears that this song was performed by the group Tears for Fears and was only released in 1985, one year after Christine Van Hees's death. These findings are the subject of the official report 152.536/97 dated 13.11.1997.

2. We recall that during previous interrogations, X1 first pointed out the photo of a person who was not Christine Van Hees (Anik D). During a later interrogation and without wanting to look at the images, X1 confirms her first choice as being Christine Van Hees (this photo corresponds to Anik D). During this interrogation, they ask for a third time to point out where Christine Van Hees is depicted in the stack of photos, which X1 refuses to do. It is clear that X1 can only point out Christine Van Sees with access to more information. Only after she learns that she can see Van Hees through the paper (at the direction of the detective!) does she designate the photocopy with the picture turned over as Christine. From that moment on, her attitude changes completely, having to point out pictures of Christine Van Hees. We note that X1, upon having 'recognised' this photograph, she relaxed.

3. One of the investigators then presents her with a set of photographs depicting Christine Van Hees. X1 is asked if she can tell us where these pictures were taken. X1 is unable to answer. The investigators then specify that it would be interesting for the investigation to know where these pictures were taken since they were found in Christine Van Hees's room after her death. Where they came from is unknown in the current state of the inquiry. From then on, X1 is 99 per cent formal and presents it as if it were photographs taken of Christine in the apartment of An's parents in Ghent. She also specifies that these are soft porn photographs to attract potential customers. Searches carried out at the time revealed that these photographs were not taken in the apartment of An's parents in Ghent but in the apartment of the mother of the guard of the Poseidon skating rink. The named Albert D has formally admitted that he took them and that he gave a copy to Christine Van Hees. Verifications at the apartment of D's mother revealed that these photographs were indeed taken in this apartment. These determinations are the subject of the official report 118.721/97 on 14.12.1996 and 151.210/97 on 28.04.1997.

Hearing 11 on the date of 10.12.1996:

- The detectives go with X1 to the Welriekende Dreef area to identify the house where the sex parties allegedly took place and to which Nihoul possessed the keys.
- X1 tells us the facts of the sex parties during which Christine Van Hees was present. She first situates these parties in a villa in which several models of boats encased in glass cabinets are displayed, and secondly in a riding school, where the sadomasochistic acts, as well as sacrifices of animals, took place. Were present as victims during these sex parties: Christine, Mieke, Anne and X1.
- X1 finally tells us about the murder of Mieke that took place at the beginning of November, following the death of Christine Van Hees (11. 1984). By mutual agreement, it is decided that the details of these facts will be the subject of a subsequent interrogation.

Observations:

1. The house that X1 mentioned as a place where sex parties took place and is situated close to the Welriekende Dreef is recognised as the house at Van Péstraat 55 in Auderghem (cfr. PV 119.124/96 of 10.12.1996).

2. X1 tells us new facts that, until then, had yet to be reported and do not correspond to the explanation X1 gave us during previous interrogations concerning the frequency of her contact with Christine Van Hees. X1 also adds a new character called Mieke. As a result of searches to identify a certain Mieke (about whom X1 says her real name is Marie-Thérèse), we have been able to establish that a Mieke can be found in the immediate surroundings of X1. Indeed, Mieke is the first name of the wife of X1's cousin, Mieke Van de Walle. These observations are the subject of the official report 152.701/97 dated 04.12.1997.

Hearing 12 on the date of 11.12.1996:

- The detectives go with X1 to a riding school in Meise, intending to identify the riding school quoted by X1 during the previous interrogation, where sex parties took place.

- X1 tells us about the murder of her five-month-old son Tiu. These facts took place in that riding school on the same day as the murder of Christine Van Hees.
- X1 provides details about Christine Van Hees, who was present at the riding school. Christine Van Hees and Nihoul left the riding school before Tiu's murder.
- The detectives conducting the interrogation remark that X1's account contradicts statements she made during her previous interrogations. They question her about these contradictions. X1 realises a problem and asks that the interrogations be stopped. When the detectives ask who she is trying to protect, X1 replies that it is always difficult to involve her mother.

Observations:

As a result of searches conducted, detectives drove X1 to an equestrian centre at Strooistraat 14 in 1860 Oppem-Meise. The equestrian centre now bears the name Morgan Horse Club and formerly Paddock. X1 recognises the equestrian centre as the one where the murder of Tiu took place. These findings are the subject of the official report 119.138/96 dated 11. 12.1996. From the information obtained within the framework of dossier 86/96, it also appears that Michel Nihoul had a horse in this riding school.

As for the details that X1 gives about Christine, she says she was wearing a dark sweater with the number 8 in white. We recall that X1 already mentioned this sweater in her seventh interrogation of 13.11.1996, specifying that it was a sweater like those worn by American Football players.

Regarding this sweater, the parents of Van Hees, as well as a large number of people close to her, were questioned. None of them confirmed that Christine Van Hees owned this sweater. These findings are the subject of the official report 152.536/97 dated 13.11.1997. On the other hand, when searching the objects seized during a house search at X1's residence, we found a photograph of X1 in a photo album, on which she is wearing a yellow sweater with the number 8 written in black (as well as another number that

we cannot read). These observations are the subject of our official report 152.461/97 dated 29.10.1997.

We have established that X1 includes new individuals and new, severe facts (such as the murder of her son Tiu), which she never reported until then. As a result, the previous interrogations are contradictory and face a completely different account of the same facts. Confronted with her contradictions by a detective, X1 becomes aware of the problem and expresses her desire to stop everything. When she realises that the detectives are still convinced of the truthfulness of the facts and attribute this state of affairs to the possible protection of someone, X1 confirms this protection, for she says: 'It is difficult to involve my mother.' In this way, she can justify her contradictions. We note that up to this point, X1 has never refrained from implicating her grandmother and mother in similar facts. We also point out some problems concerning the statements about Tiu, son of X1.

1. X1 indeed states that her son was born in September 1983. In her fax of 20.12.1996, she specifies Tiu's date of birth (03.09.1983).
2. In an interrogation about the murder of Clo, X1 specifies that Clo died sometime after she gave birth, namely in October or November 1983.
3. In another interrogation, X1 specifies that she was pregnant at the time of Clo's death and counting down the days before giving birth.
4. In an interrogation about the murder of Véronique D., X1 never mentions that she was at the end of a pregnancy or had given birth. We recall that Véronique D. died on 04.09.1983, one day after the birth of Tiu. We hereby attach a table concerning all the information on Tiu provided by X1. This table is the subject of Annexe 01.

Hearing 13 on date of 15.12.1996.

- This interrogation was faxed on the day of the murders of Tiu and Christine Van Hees. School photos of Christine Van Hees are shown to X1.
- The detectives try to obtain more details about the events which transpired on this day.
- X1 completely freezes. The detectives then respond by questioning her.

Observations:

1. Concerning the indication of the class pictures, X1 indicates a young girl as being a friend of Van Hees. This girl would have taken part in sex parties that would have taken place in the house in the Théo Van Péstraat. X1 initially thinks the girl's name is Pascale, but later on, she is no longer sure. As a result of searches, this girl was identified as Muriel A.

2. Concerning the events of the day during which the facts in the stables and the mushroom farm took place (13.02.1984), X1 mentions numerous massive contradictions in her statements compared to previous ones about the same points.

- She indeed adds another character to the account of the facts. Until then, she had not quoted Mieke in the context of the day of 13.02.1984, namely the murder of Tiu and Christine Van Hees. Confronted with these contradictions, the investigators lecture her, telling her that it cannot go on like this because, in the end, they will construct the history of X1. A detective specifies that if X1 was present during the facts, she should talk about the events by answering an open question with a clear and direct answer (cfr. pages 27 to 28 of the interrogation, added to PV 119.128/96 on 13.12.1996.
- The detectives add that X1 makes herself less credible because as the interrogations progress, she incessantly adds characters and very serious facts about which she has not spoken until then.
- X1 justifies herself by explaining that she is tired and that it is tough for her to remember these facts. She clarifies that she keeps finding new information each time she returns to her memory.

Conclusions:

We note that as the interrogations of X1 continue on the same facts, the latter mentions so many different versions and contradictions that it becomes impossible for us to draw a correct and clear timeline. Indeed, according to her various statements, X1 would have given birth on 03.09.1983 as well as 16.06.1983, etc... Faced with these contradictions, she tries to correct herself by changing the

date or the year, but that then no longer corresponds to the facts parallel to her story.

Problems with the procedure:

We recall that these interrogations were carried out within the framework of the 64/85 file of Mr Van Espen. Given the facts described and the persons cited, it would not be useless to add this information to the 109/96 file of examining magistrate Langlois at Neufchâteau.*26 Vandeput W, Verhaegen E., Ooms B., Alvarez C., For agreement, Dernicourt B. 1MDC *27

One point stands out immediately. The hit song from the band Tears for Fears was indeed released in 1985. During the interrogation on December 9, 1996, X1 was talking in a rather rational and very affirmative way about the group of girls in which she met 'Kristien' and who were the idols of the music world at that time. Faced with this fact, Regina Louf sighed deeply and retorted: 'Well, well, what a discovery. I made a mistake. And that's the big proof that I wouldn't have known Kristien? The search for the release date of the Tears for Fears record is apparently one of the re-readers' first 'actions on the ground'. One went to the French-speaking Community's media library in Brussels to prove this.*29

One of the following discoveries is about CV, the former cleaning lady of X1's mother. She has a daughter named 'Cheyenne'. That, the re-reader notes, is also the name X1 gave to her infant son killed in a snuff movie. Cheyenne is a rare name, and the thesis that X1 would name fellow victims based on characters from her surroundings rears its head here.

However: the discovery was made nine months earlier when Adjudant De Baets led the investigation. How could it be that this fact did not worry anyone at the time? It's very simple. The daughter of CV is not called Cheyenne but Chayenne. This is how it is correctly stated in the official report that was drawn up at the time, and this is where the re-readers now—once again—drew their conclusions.*30 They apparently assume that no one will notice that they have changed a letter.

Now, Cheyenne or Chayenne, who cares? Both names are very similar. Maybe X1 remembered the name poorly and

didn't know the correct spelling. Could that be? No. CV worked in the dog grooming salon of X1's mother in the early 1980s and stayed there for a few months due to marital problems.*31 When questioned later about X1's family, CV did not look back on this period with great pleasure, as she suspects that her baby (a sister of the then not yet born Chayenne) was sexually abused at the house of X1 by the ever-present Tony V. 'After my departure there, I have not had any contact whatsoever with that family,' CV declares when the Brussels BOB confronts her with X1 at the beginning of 1997. Although the confrontation did not occur in a pleasant atmosphere, both women agree on one point: since 1983, they have lost sight of each other entirely.*32

Chayenne was born in 1992. If CV and the X1 family did not see or hear each other after 1983, it suddenly becomes much less plausible that X1 could have known the name of this child of CV. One can, of course, suggest that X1 and CV could have bumped into each other later on, and talked about their children. Since the re-readers did not see fit to do so, we undertook our attempt to inquire about Mrs CV. We first tried by telephone and bumped into her husband. He is not very fond of X1 and the whole affair around it. 'That Regina Louf is crazy', he concluded, based on what he read in the newspaper. On this one point, Mr CV is certain: 'My wife and Regina Louf had not seen each other for sixteen years until the confrontation. She could not have known the name of our little daughter in 1996. Impossible.'*33

Conclusion? The similarity between the names Cheyenne and Chayenne is, in more than all probability, based on coincidence. By the way, Regina Louf has been a fan of Native American culture since she was a child. Hence: Cheyenne.

What the juggling of names can lead to becomes apparent when the re-readers think they can detect a link between the 'Mieke' in X1's statements and the spouse of her cousin. She is also called Mieke. Perhaps the French re-reader was unaware that at least one million Flemish people have someone in their family with the name or nickname 'Mieke'. A vast spectrum of girls' names -from Anne-Marie to Marie-Louise- are converted to 'Mieke' in everyday intercourse in Flanders. The Mieke theory amounts almost to the same thing as arguing that

“chief re-reader Baudouin Dernicourt can be none other than the deceased King of the Belgians” (King Baudouin).

An, on the surface, more convincing element from the third re-reading is the short list of X1's absences from school between 1983 and '85: two days only. One can infer that X1 was attending school on February 13, 1984, the day of Christine Van Hees' murder. Police officers often tend to stare themselves blind on a paper document. In this case, it is not certain that the attendance records unquestionably reflect reality. Former classmates whom the Ghent police officers were planning to interrogate in the second half of 1997 say that X1 was 'regularly absent' or that she 'sometimes disappeared from school in the afternoon.'³⁴ If that is correct, we are discussing more than the two days mentioned in the official registers. All those who had the privilege of being in state education in the 1980s know how the noble principles of the Renewed Secondary Education (VSO) stipulated that teachers should not patronise their pupils too much. In many schools, it was customary for one of the students to be made responsible for upkeep of the attendance register- which allowed endless opportunities for truancy to go unnoticed. That is also how it went in the RMS of Sint-Amandsberg, as a classmate of X1 from 1984 will later explain to the Ghent BOB.

But even if the attendance register for February 13, 1984, would reflect an accurate picture, it is far from certain if X1 as such has an 'alibi' for the murder of Christine Van Hees. Based on the testimonies of residents who noticed screaming near the old mushroom farm, the murder happened between 6.45 and 7.30 p.m. Also, in 1984, a drive from Ghent to Brussels took no longer than 45 minutes. If X1 left after school, even at 5 p.m., she could still arrive in Brussels in plenty of time. What is not possible is the scene described by her in a riding school on the outskirts of Brussels, from where the whole group drove to Auderghem and where 'Kristien' was tortured for hours. 'I put together several events during those first interrogations,' Regina Louf said later. 'Try to understand the situation I was in at the time. I did not want to remember those events; I had repressed them. Only later did the picture become clearer for me.'³⁵

One of the people who blew a lot of hot air in 1998 to dismiss the whole X1 history as an out-of-control case of mass hysteria is the Dutch professor of experimental psychology, Harald Merckelbach. He devoted two publications to X1. He posits that substitute Paule Somers succeeded in 'laying hands' on the attendance register in one of them. It must be evident that De Baets does not know his job', Merckelbach writes. 'How did he not think of that?'

*36 If anyone here needs to learn his job, it is Professor Merckelbach. The attendance register has been in the Van Hees file since 20 December 1996, attached to the official report number 118.222. It is almost impossible to verify this much faster than this. X1 has only spoken about 'Kristien' for the first time a few weeks earlier, and at that moment, the Van Hees file has not even been officially reopened. The report was drawn up by BOB officer Merjeai, a member of the fourth team of the Neufchâteau cell, who at that time received her instructions from adjutant De Baets. In his publications, Professor Merckelbach rails against people who, in his mind, 'refuse to face the facts'.

In their third report, the re-readers also reexamine the troubles surrounding the picture of Christine Van Hees. It is said that during her interrogation on December 9, 1996, when X1 finally managed to point out the correct picture at a third attempt, she was 'helped' by De Baets. By now, you can almost take it for granted that it is never true when the re-reader writes anything about this event, and that goes the same for this case. The fact that De Baets would have told X1 when turning over the photograph of Christine Van Hees that she could "see through the paper" is correct, but the re-readers do not divulge that this happens after the following passage. X1 notices the photograph of Christine Van Hees, quickly turns it over and refuses to look at it:

- She's in there, yeah.
- She's who? Is that the girl we spoke of sitting there?
- Yeah, she's in there, yeah.
- Is it that girl we're talking about?
- Yes, it is.
- All day long?
- Yes.

- Have you turned them over yet?
- (nods yes)
- Was it her that you turned so quickly?
- (nods yes)*37

Contrary to what public opinion has been led to believe for months, X1 recognised the photo of Christine Van Hees on her own accord.

The third report cites an additional photo incident indicating that X1 is making things up. At the end of the December 9 interrogation, she is shown some photographs of Christine Van Hees, taken by Albert D, the son of the supervisor of the Poseidon skating rink. They are grainy, kitschy photos in which Christine Van Hees poses with a sensual smile. They were taken to the house of Albert D's parents in Tervuren. The originals were in the old court dossier. X1's interrogators show her four photographs from D's collection and tell her that no one has ever known where they came from. Does she have any idea? X1 looks at the photos for minutes and then says she has never seen them before. A little later, she suddenly comes back to the pictures herself:

- Shit.
- Hm? What? What are you saying?
- Shit.
- Shit?
- They are; I am 99 per cent sure that these (pictures) were taken at An('s place) (...).
- Do you think you can recognise the furniture or something... That sofa?
- That wallpaper, too, is one of those floral ones.

This little dialogue is somewhat problematic for X1. It seems to illustrate a risk that the Igodt report warned about the bond between interrogator and victim becoming so close that the latter starts saying things to please the investigators. However, the re-reader's argument is also a knife that cuts both ways. After all, this passage can prove that Adjudant De Baets had no knowledge of the old Van Hees dossier on December 9. After all, it is very clear from this dossier who

took the picture that this individual had nothing to do with the murder.

But X1 clearly does recognise the photos. She is 'for 99 per cent sure' that they were taken in an apartment in Ghent, at the home of An's parents. Those who have never seen the four photos will have long since drawn their conclusions: X1 lied. Those who did see them will probably be milder in their judgments. Albert D was apparently experimenting with darkening techniques in 1984. The first of the four photos is a pitch-black rectangle with a heart in the middle. Only Christine Van Hees's face is visible, nothing else. There is no sign of an interior. The second photo shows a close-up of the girl on a couch. Nothing of the interior can be seen except for the stripes of the upholstery on the sofa. The third photo is a black area, with Christine Van Hees in the middle, wearing a cap and glasses. Only in the fourth photo can we see something of an interior: a small piece of a doorway and a minuscule scrap of wallpaper.*38

Painful, for X1, it seems, when one checks the birthdates of her children, which she claims were murdered, to the rest of her account. Then it turns out that Tiu, if he existed and if the date mentioned by X1 is correct, was indeed born one day before the death of Véronique D. Asked about this, Regina Louf later says that dates remain an inextricable tangle for her, but that she does remember that at the time of Véronique D's death, she was 'heavily pregnant'. However, During the interrogations, she never spoke a word about this quite relevant fact.

The story of the teddy bear is also intriguing, although it is not the case that the re-reader found out that the parents of Christine Van Hees can't remember anything about a stuffed animal as described by X1. De Baets' assistant Aimé Bille bought such a bear at Christiaensen's toy shop in April 1996, brought it to the parents, and learned that it did not mean anything to them.*39 What interests the X1- detectives at that moment is the date the Heart-to-Heart bear was introduced on the market in Belgium. In 1983, the manufacturer confirmed.*40 In contrast to the Tears for Fears debate, the re-readers do not consider this information worth mentioning.

The fact that Regina Louf received the same bear as a present from her fiancé without saying anything about it during her testimony is supposed to indicate that she might be mixing things up. Regina Louf herself has no recollection of such a teddy bear. Her current husband, who allegedly gave her the teddy bear, also has no memory of it.

Whether the sweater with the number eight can also be added to the list of items that X1 may have grafted from her youth onto that of 'Kristien' is less obvious. In the early eighties, thousands of Belgian teenagers walked around with such a sweater. It was a craze that kept pace with jeans. According to the re-readers, the research showed that Christine Van Hees never had such a sweater. What the re-readers do forget to mention in this regard is that X1 made a minor correction shortly after her interrogation. She did so on December 17, 1996. That day, X1 faxed the BOB: 'Christine did have a sweater with the number eight on, just as I told her, but it was not her sweater. It was a sweater of Mieke, for the simple reason that Christine had vomited on her clothes.'*41

The re-readers were perfectly aware of this fax, which was even translated by one of their team at the time. Based on the fax, one could suppose that the X1-people already knew mid-December '96 that Christine Van Hees never had such a sweater, that this somehow came to X1's attention and that she quickly adjusted her story. It is an excellent hypothesis, but it does not correspond to reality. If the detectives had been indiscreet to X1 on this point and X1 responded to what she was told, she would have eagerly confirmed that Christine Van Hees had such a sweater and, at most, amended her version concerning the colour. What do we read in an interrogation of Christine Van Hees's mother on December 11, 1996, six days before the fax was sent? 'Christine had a T-shirt with one or more black numbers.'*42 Immediately, the question arises as to what leads the re-reader to state that Christine Van Hees did not possess a sweater with a number on it at all. At first glance, one could add the black bicycle to the assortment of stuff only X1 has seen. Parents and friends of Christine Van Hees deny in the most formal way that she owned such a bicycle. 'She had an orange bicycle,' says her mother and her brother.*43 Thus,

the bike in no way matched X1's description: black, large, Dutch type. The easiest solution in this investigation is to decide that X1 is raving mad. You can also look further than the length of your nose and read, for example, what the mother of Carine Dellaert declared to the Ghent BOB in September 1997: `My daughter Carine had a bicycle. It was an old bicycle, a Dutch model of black colour. She used the bike to ride to and from school (...). After her disappearance, I have not seen the bicycle again.`*44.

Is it possible that X1, in her memory, has mixed up the bikes of two victims? To the extent that the exposure of child murders concerns them, the re-readers do not bother to check.

And then comes the "moment suprême" of the third re-reading. During the December 15, 1996 interrogation, the re-readers note X1 is presented with several class photos that also show Christine Van Hees. X1 points to the picture of a particular girl and claims that this girl participated in sex parties with Nihoul. X1 first believes she knows the girl's name is Pascale, but later on, she is no longer sure of that,' state the re-readers. Then they declare: `As a result of searches, this girl could be identified as the named Muriel A.' This is their point: X1 got the name wrong; the girl's name is not Pascale, but Muriel. The implications of what the re-readers touch on here go further from their presumptions. Whether named or not, Pascale first appears in the December 9 interrogation. X1 describes the afternoons when she, Christine Van Hees, and a friend of hers were present with Nihoul at an apartment in Brussels. X1 initially described her as 'a blonde girl with short hair'. Her interrogators attempt to extract more details:

- I think the blonde was the girlfriend she often met. As in: I'll sleep over at your place or come over on Wednesday afternoon. You tell your parents... I don't know...
- The one with the short blonde hair?
- Yeah.
- Don't you remember a first name?
- No.
- Don't you remember Kristien ever calling the name of this girl? Didn't she speak to her girlfriends?
- Yes, not all the time, but yes.
- Ok, but can you hear what the first name was or something?

- I can't remember; I don't know. I think she was called Pascale, but I dare not say for sure.*45

On December 15, X1 is shown five photographs. Two are classic schoolyear photos with all the students neatly lined up. One photo dates to the 1982-'83 school year, and the other to 1983-'84. The other three photos show groups of boys and girls during field trips to the forest. In total, X1 observes about fifty faces in one sitting. She picks out Christine Van Hees and three classmates. The detectives of the De Baets team had a list of nearly all the names of Christine Van Hees' former classmates at their disposal at the end of 1996. They can quickly discover who exactly X1 has pointed at: Muriel A.*46. So again, this is not something the re-readers uncovered but merely copied from the existing dossier. In the dossier from '84, we found this: 'Christine was very much bonded to Muriel, who attended language classes in the fourth year last year', Patricia S declares to the Judiciary Police a few days after the murder. She is the friend with whom Christine Van Hees had a mysterious correspondence until shortly before her death.*47 Jean-Claude J, who went to the same school, had a long talk with Christine Van Hees shortly before and also in 1984 says: 'Christine had a friend who attended the same school last year, and must know her very well. It is Muriel A. She explained that Christine had told her parents that she had stayed overnight at her place while she was actually somewhere else. Muriel told me that Christine had also told her parents that she would stay at her place the night of February 13. Christine's father called her parents that Monday evening to ask if she was there.'*48 Pascale DB, also a pupil at that school, recalls: 'I know one girl who was regularly waiting for Christine at the gate. This was a former pupil of our school whose name was Muriel. Christine regularly had sleepovers at her place.'*49 Marc C, a classmate, says: If Christine divulged her secrets to anyone, it was probably Muriel A.*50 Pascale K, who was also at school with Christine Van Hees, remembers: 'Christine was very close friends with Muriel A. At night, they sometimes went out together to meet friends without their parents knowing.*51

What do we remember from this? One: Christine Van Hees had two female friends named Pascale. Two: X1 picked out from dozens of girls' faces just the one girl with whom Christine Van Hees apparently had an exceptional bond and who apparently acted as an alibi for staying out overnight. That is precisely the role that X1 also attributed to one of the girls 'at the apartment.' Although she sees it differently, Muriel A could undoubtedly be dubbed a potential key witness. When questioned in 1984, she denied everything: 'In September 1983, I changed schools, which meant I saw Christine less often. I saw her three or four times at the end of 1983. She never stayed the night at our house. I saw her again one last time in January 1984.*52.

If X1's story is true - she who betrays the network pays for it in the most gruesome way - it is perhaps not entirely illogical that Muriel A continued to deny emphatically until the end of her days that she had any contact with X1 after the summer of 1983. The De Baets team also adopted this perspective at the beginning of 1997, had her landline and cell phone bugged and asked for her medical file at the RIZIV. Before this could lead to any results and they could question Muriel A again, the X1 detectives were dismissed from the investigation. You would then at least expect the re-readers to have talked to Muriel A.

`That did not happen,' Muriel A tells us. `I was interrogated once in 1984 and never again after that. I don't see why that should have happened either because I mentioned everything back then. I was pretty much her best friend until the summer of 1983, when we lost contact. I never went to parties with her. Afterwards, I learned that she was telling her parents that she was staying overnight with me when, in reality, she was elsewhere. Now, she never stayed the night at my place, never.*53 Muriel A never knew Regina Louf recognised her in a photo. She only followed the X1 affair through the media, and although she knew Christine Van Hees well, she did not have a strong opinion about the affair. `Yes, but at least thanks to that girl, they started looking again,' she remarks.

NOTES:

1. Second final report of the Verwilghen Commission, chapter V, part 2.
2. Note BOB Brussels, February 5, 1998, Ant 59/98: 'In the annexe, you will find the report of 05.02.1998, which draws up the specifications of the re-readings of the interrogations 14 to 17 of the witness X1.'
3. Note from Demicourt to Duterme, Brussels BOB, October 27 1997, Ant 401/97.
4. The Bastogne BOB investigated the 87/96 file on automobile scams and the murder of Bernard Weinstein. It is, therefore, logical that all information on Weinstein should be centralised there in the first place.
5. Interview with Michel Clippe, November 1998.
6. Statement Michel Clippe, October 25, 1997.
7. Bernard Weinstein is in prison in Pontoise until October 23, 1979. Later, he ended up in the Melin prison, where he remained until his release: Brussels BOB, February 28, 1997, PV 150,403. At Melin, he was granted penitentiary leave on the following dates, each time from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m.: 6 to May 11 1983, 12 to August 17 1983, November 10 to November 15 1983, May 11 to May 16 1984, August 24 to September 3 1984, 15 to March 20 1985 and 14 to June 24 1985. Brussels PDO, October 16, 1997, pv 152,487. As Clippe rightly points out, this list only includes holidays of five days or more. It does not include the weekends off.
8. BOB Brussels, June 18 1997, pv 151.891. Hoskens writes the words 'in detail' in capitals.
9. In the second report of the re-reading, there is talk of an interim synthesis report of the first five X1 examinations. No trace of this report can be found in the collection of 'reads', which will be circulated later among the magistrates involved.
10. Hereafter, for each of the interrogations analysed, a series of tasks still 'to be performed' is listed, which we will withhold from the reader because of its limited relevance. One of the 'tasks' was determining when the company Gamma was trading on the Belgian market. Indeed, one of the items X1 says he noticed in the old mushroom farm was a Gamma plastic bag. This company celebrated its 20th anniversary in August 1999. So it had been on the Belgian market for five years in 1984. No

word is said about this 'verification' in the following reports. This again gives an idea about the objectivity of the re-reader.

11. 'Synthesis and comments...' (second re-reading), BOB Brussels, October 30 1997.
12. Interrogation Michel Nihoul, National Brigade Judiciary Police, October 30 1996, pv 10.586.
13. Interrogation of Marleen De Cokere, Brussels Judiciary Police, September 16 1996, PV 39.144.
14. Findings BOB Brussels, October 13 1996, PV 115.458.
15. File Michel Nihoul, April 27, 1983, file 4238 on United Corporation.
16. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, December 9, 1996, PV 118.727.
17. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, October 31, 1996, PV 119.128. During this interrogation, X1 speaks about 'Natasha' and will correct herself later. Various details, such as her boyfriend's name and hippie appearance, tell us that this is the same girl.
18. Interrogation Katia DS, BOB Ghent, 1 September 1997, PV 103.011.
19. Synthesis report, BOB Ghent, September 1 1997, PV 103.011.
20. BOB Brussels, October 27 1997, PV 152.507.
21. BOB Brussels, October 10 1997, PV 152.484. The falsified account of the X1 hearing of November 18 1996, appears on the third page.
22. Interrogation X1, November 18 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 116.991.
23. BOB Ghent, 18 September 1997, PV 103.289.
24. Onsite visit, April 20 1999.
25. At the request of CV's family, her full name was replaced by initials in this original text. This is the same cleaner that was discussed in Chapter 5.3. In the text of the re-readings, we also replaced other names with initials.
26. Again, the enumeration of 'still to be done' was omitted.
27. 'Synthesis and comments...' (third re-reading), Brussels BOB, December 17 1997, added to note Ant 450/97, Brussels BOB, January 12 1998.

28. Interview with Regina Louf, October 18 1998.
29. 'Synthesis and comments...' (third re-reading), BOB Brussels, December 17 1997, added to note Ant 450/97, BOB Brussels, January 12 1998.
30. Interrogation C.V, BOB Brussels, 2 March 1997, pv 150.546. Salient detail: BOB Eddy Verhaegen conducted this interrogation, who was then subordinate to De Baets and is now a re-reader. Therefore, it is absurd to present the discovery of the name Chayenne as something 'new'. Verhaegen already knew about it in March.
31. BOB Brussels, January 21 1997, PV 150.019.
32. Confrontation X1-C.V., 22 March 1997, PV 150.885.
33. Telephone contact with CV and her husband, December 16 1998.
34. Interrogation Anja D., BOB Ghent, September 25, 1997, pv 103.387. Report BOB Ghent, September 1, 1997, PV 103.011.
35. Interview with Regina Louf, June 29, 1998.
36. 'How it ended with witness X1', Herald Merckelbach, Dth, December 1998, page 404.
37. Interview X1, BOB Brussels, December 9, 1996, PV 118.727.
38. Strangely enough, the four photos are attached to a report by which the Brussels BOB ended the X1-track in the Van Hees dossier at the end of 1997. BOB Brussels, November 13, 1997, PV 152.536, annexes 9 to 12.
39. Interrogations Pierre Van Hees and Antoinette Vanhoucke, BOB Brussels, April 5, 1997, PV 151.064 and 151.095.
40. BOB Brussels, April 24 1997, PV 151.317.
41. Fax X1 to BOB Brussels, December 17, 1996, added to PV 118.877.
42. Interview Antoinette Vanhoucke, Brussels BOB, December 11 1996, PV 118.323
43. Interview Eric Van Hees, Brussels BOB, December 15 1996, PV 118.722.
44. Interrogation Noëlla Bovyn, BOB Ghent, 22 September 1997, PV 103.332.
45. Interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, December 9 1996, PV 118.727.
46. Notes on interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, December 15 1996, PV 118.454.

47. Interrogation of Patricia S, Brussels Judiciary Police, February 16 1984, PV 6443.
48. Interrogation of Jean-Claude J, Brussels Judiciary Police, February 23 1984, PV 7213.
49. Interrogation of Pascale D.B., Brussels Judiciary Police, July 31 1984, PV 16587.
50. Interview with Marc C., BOB Brussels, April 19 1997, PV 151.267.
51. Interview with Pascale K., BOB Brussels, June 7 1997, PV 151.930
52. Interrogation of Muriel A., BOB Brussels, May 10 1984, PV 10916.
53. Telephone conversation with Muriel A., December 2 1998.

3. 'By the way, Van Espen's sister is my son's godmother.'

Michel Nihoul, 8 October 1996.

Plop, a champagne cork. Noisy conversations from self-satisfied citizens. It is March 4, 1998, in the heart of Brussels. In the restaurant "Au Jour Le Jour", near the Koningsplein, only three tables are occupied on this rainy Wednesday evening. One of them drowns out the others. Marleen De

Cokere, Charles Haroux and a third person are celebrating the official signing of the contract. 'At least one million' is Haroux's estimate of the proceeds Michel Nihoul will make from the book. This book, written in the prison in Arlon, was the talk of the town in those days. If all goes well, the book will be published on April 23rd, Nihoul's birthday. 'Across Europe, in at least five languages.' Haroux is a business adventurer. He has barely followed the Dutroux case and does not know Nihoul too well. He talks that night about 'a bomb' and about 'hundreds of pictures of Nihoul in the company of very important people'. There has been much speculation about Nihoul's networks. Depending on the circumstances, Nihoul will refer to himself as a myth created by the media, or he brags about his arm being 'as long as the Danube.' The curious thing about the whole Nihoul saga is that if one tried to predict in August 1996 how things would turn out if one of the main suspects of the Dutroux affair were "protected", the scenario would probably not differ much from how the events would unfold in reality.

Au Jour Le Jour is the place where Michel Nihoul is counting on a festive welcome sooner or later. This is the base of his fan club. And when it comes to culinary matters, he has taste, it must be said. And so do the officials of the Court of Cassation and the Court of Audit, boasts restaurant manager Léopold Godfraind. Those folks usually visit his establishment in the afternoon. In the evening, the audience mixes with frivolous gentlemen and ladies dressed up to the nines - the contented citizens of the capital. 'He is my friend, and he always will be,' the cook interjects unsolicited into every nightly conversation he hears about the Neufchâteau investigation. He states his unvarnished opinion over a few glasses of house cognac. 'The unlucky chap. That he, of all people, had to have his car repaired by that scum ... Okay, Michel was often involved in peculiar dealings, but with his friends, he paid off his debt to the last penny. I then offered him a meal. Pay me when things get better, I said. And so he did. Sex with children? For Pete's sake... Michel liked adult women, I can tell. I went out with him often enough.'

The entire year's volume of the French-language weekly *Le Soir Illustré* is stacked on a small table in the restaurant's corner. At the start of the Dutroux case, the magazine spent

months ruthlessly hacking into what was called the "Nihoul movement." A journalist from the magazine was later convicted of a fabricated report about Nihoul's alibi supplier, Michel Vander Elst. After the summer of 1997, *Le Soir Illustré* changed its tune. The primary victim of this whole affair is Nihoul, became the new narrative in this publication. This is also the legal reality since the Liège Chamber of Indictments (KIB) annulled the arrest warrant issued for Nihoul on January 22, 1997. Officially, he remains accused of ganging up with Dutroux and being an accomplice to the kidnappings of Julie, Melissa and Laetitia. However, the first serious attempt to convince judges of this proposition has failed grossly. Because of his recently incurred conviction in the SOS Sahel case, Nihoul remains quietly in jail.*1

The investigation into Nihoul's involvement in the Dutroux case is in the hands of the National Brigade of the Judicial Police. A separate cell called Obelix was formed within that department. In September, a highly charged dispute had already arisen between coordinator Eddy Suys and commissioner Georges Marnette. The latter assisted the Obelix cell with his team from Brussels, but the cooperation was not straightforward. At the end of 1996, the Neufchâteau public prosecutor received a tip about the Brussels porn dealer Raymond C. He was said to be a good acquaintance of Nihoul and would source child pornography every week from the Netherlands. The man hid the material every Friday night in a hangar near the Tracogaz tank transport company in Drogenbos. Marnette was ordered to look into this lead. He ignored the order. He calmly walks into Suys' office and says: 'C is a good friend of mine. And as a matter of fact, I protect him. I guarantee that he has absolutely nothing to do with child pornography, and I have no intention of doing anything else about the case.'*2 When investigators from the Obelix cell raid C's hangar a few months later on a Friday evening, he waits for them, grinning broadly: 'I knew you would come.'*3 He asks the Judiciary Police officers if they want to say hello to his good friend Georges Marnette.

On February 17 1997, Eddy Suys complained to the Verwilghen Commission, behind closed doors, about this opposition. After only a few months, his superiors began to

economise on people and resources. The Obelix cell had only seven

investigators by now. They are tasked to dig up Nihoul's past and that of Annie Bouty, Casper Flier, Michel Forgeot, Dolores Bara and others. Suys complains about Marnette before the Commission. Five different testimonies in the investigation claim Marnette is a notorious swinger, precisely in the milieu where the inquiry should be conducted. For Suys, it is logical for a police officer to withdraw in such circumstances. Instead, he says, Marnette did everything he could to lead the investigation. A few days before his appearance, Suys wrote a letter to the Commission to outline the main points of his story.*4 A copy of that letter was sent to the broadcaster RTL-TVi on January 30, 1997 - two and a half weeks before Suys' appearance before the Commission. PS member Claude Eerdeken is waving it around during a live TV program "Controversy" broadcast.

Anyone who reconstructs the leaks from the Verwilghen Commission will be amazed at how, time and again, it is Eerdeken, who is so prominent in TV debates, who has a hand in several manoeuvres which subsequently have far-reaching consequences. During the TV broadcast, Eerdeken quotes Suys' letter, adds a little here and there, and thus provides Marnette with ammunition to lodge a complaint against his colleague for slander and defamation. This leads to the somewhat absurd situation where Marnette files a complaint with the Brussels public prosecutor's office at the beginning of February 1997 because of statements that Suys had not yet made at that time... He will never make it either because Suys was upfront in his speech to the Commission about 'testimonies' that still have to be objectified.

At the end of 1998, investigating judge Pignolet - who was also allowed to look into this case - was so convinced that Suys, De Baets and others belonged to some clandestine club whose sole aim was to destabilise the kingdom of Belgium that, based on Marnette's complaint, he had Suys referred to the criminal court for 'blasphemy and defamation'. Suys did not get much of a chance to defend himself. The notice of his appearance

before the chambers was sent - no doubt by 'error' - to the wrong address. The accusations against Suys briefly receive much attention in the media but are soon forgotten.

There exists nearly enough material for a separate book on the investigation into the involvement of Michel Nihoul. One of the investigators from the Judiciary Police also managed one day to lose a video cassette that had been seized from Casper Flier. When Suys removes the man from the investigation for this reason, the latter goes to Committee P to accuse his commissioner of having an affair with a Spanish translator and of giving her lucrative legal assignments. The complaint is fictitious, and after several months of investigation, Committee P can do nothing but dismiss it, but that does not prevent this from being widely reported in the media. If the evidence against Nihoul had been available at the end of 1996, it would have been a miracle for the Judiciary Police to have found it.

Strange things happen not only at the Brussels Judiciary Police but also at the high echelons of the Brussels gendarmerie as soon as the name Nihoul is mentioned. On December 2 1997, Brussels BOB officer Luc Delmartino, a member of the Neufchâteau branch, was questioned by Pignolet. The latter wanted to know how it was that Bourlet and Connerotte sided entirely with De Baets at the end of 1996 and seemed to be having such a hard time with Delmartino's bosses, Lieutenant Colonel Jean-Marie Brabant, head of the Brussels BOB, and Lieutenant Colonel Guido Torrez, the boss of the district. Delmartino didn't have to reflect on his answer too long. It was like this: immediately after the first arrests in the Dutroux case, Connerotte had asked all the police forces in the country if they had ever conducted investigations where Nihoul's name had turned up—a relatively standard procedure. 'I know that Colonel Brabant replied negatively to Connerotte at the time,' Delmartino explains. 'This, when our third financial section should have dealt with three dossiers charged to Nihoul, including SOS Sahel.' What Delmartino has written down during his interrogation is a public secret. The BOB officer kept a low profile because, in those unpredictable days of August 1996, the BOB quietly realised that it could well be that the kidnapping of Laetitia Delhez was financed by the gendarmerie itself with a batch of XTC pills. Via Nihoul. Perhaps, as Delmartino cautiously suggests during his

interrogation, Brabant might not have remembered that event, which is also possible. What is certain is that De Baets informed Connerotte and that he adopted a careful stance from that moment on.

The 'forgetfulness' of Brabant is not an isolated fact. It suffices to read the second final report of the Verwilghen Commission carefully - and to fill in the names where they were omitted under the impetus of some socialist commission members - to understand how small the world around Michel Nihoul truly is. On the evening of October 6, 1986, a phone call from Torrez arrived at the Schaarbeek gendarmerie. Within the militaristic structure of the gendarmerie, it is rare for a commander to contact one of the men in the field directly. The Schaerbeek gendarme's surprise only increases that evening when he hears the reason for this call. Torrez informs him that he must drop his case involving a Portuguese named Juan Borges. The Schaerbeek gendarmerie has been looking for Borges for several days because he wrote an unsecured check worth 1.2 million Belgian francs. They want to arrest and bring him to justice as standard practice dictates. But that is not allowed.

On October 8, 1986, the Schaerbeek gendarme was called before the commandant. He explains why he has taken this case to heart. Two days earlier, he had received a phone call from someone who claimed to be from the cabinet of Minister of Defence François-Xavier de Donnée. At the time, the gendarmerie is still under the tutelage of defence, and Torrez believes he cannot ignore the silent hint. Only when the company Cadreco, owned by Annie Bouty, runs into bankruptcy in 1989 and its entire accounts are

confiscated does the truth come to light. Letters from Bouty reveal that behind the scenes, she made sure that Borges was not arrested. There was no phone call from the de Donnée cabinet at all. The person who made that phone call was none other than Michel Nihoul. The committee- Verwilghen arranged for Torrez to be questioned by Committee P in mid-1997. He says he was convinced at the time that the phone call came from the cabinet. 'Torrez characterises his behaviour as naive and ascribes this to the fact that he had only just been appointed district commander,' is the understanding in the

conclusion of the Verwilghen Commission. Further in the report, we read: `This story says a lot about how Nihoul and Mrs Bouty marketed their (illegal) interventions and even managed to mislead seasoned police officers.'*5

Seasoned police officer? Deception? If Torrez's explanation aligns with reality, then the stakes are high. Then it means that any criminal who fears arrest need only have a high-ranking gendarmerie officer make a phone call: `Hello, I am Mr such-and-so from the Cabinet of National Defense. May I politely ask you to leave my friend alone, please? By the way, talking about friendships, Torrez is good friends with Marnette. They are both supporters of Anderlecht football club and can often be seen together at home games.

The committee members do not clarify who this Juan Borges may be. A tourist? An ordinary grifter? Not really. Anyone who knows what Borges was up to in October 1986 becomes susceptible to the belief that the man heading the Brussels gendarmerie had assisted organised crime at Nihoul's request.

On October 12, 1986, six days after Torrez's intervention, a painting was stolen in the Brussels apartment of the widow of a former minister. It is the canvas `Portrait of a Woman' by the Italian master Amedeo Modigliani. The canvas has a value of at least 50 million Belgian francs. The theft, it later emerged, was the work of a gang whose members, in addition to Juan Borges, included the young artist Stéphane Mandelbaum and Jacques Herygers. Herygers is one of the gang members around Frédéric Godfroid, an ex-inspector of Brussels Judiciary Police who, in 1983, exchanged crime fighting for crime itself. Fredo Godfroid committed robberies and made himself stand out in the milieu as an avid sex party attendee. Partly because of this, he was good friends with another notorious party animal: former prison warden Jean Bultot, whose name was associated with the Nijvel gang for years. During the investigation into the stolen painting, Bultot's name came up. It is one of his closest friends who helped hide and resell it. Bultot and Godfroid were regulars at the Brussels club Jonathan. In this nest, gangsters and police officers fraternised against the backdrop of a wide range of unsolved

crimes at the bar or during sex parties-in-jelly. So those environments.

On January 3, 1987, the body of Stéphane Mandelbaum was found in a cave at Beez, near Namur. A dispute arose with the artist about the distribution of the proceeds of the loot, after which he was shot through the head, and his corpse was liquefied in acid. Juan Borges was convicted in 1992 of the theft of the painting but not the murder. No one has ever been arrested for that crime. After the public prosecutor's office in Namur had spent four years getting bogged down in the matter, the investigation was closed in 1990 without resolution.*6

The gendarme who wanted to arrest Juan Borges in October 1986 because of the bounced check got into trouble with his superiors and was made to leave the gendarmerie soon after. Could Torrez not have known what kind of person he was dealing with? He certainly could. Arrest warrants have been issued against Borges all over the world. Italian courts want him for gold smuggling, and in his own country, he is wanted for murder. When Borges was convicted in Brussels in 1992, along with five others, of the theft of the Modigliani, the bird had already taken flight. Borges took refuge in Canada.

Only in Belgium can the Portuguese gangster sleep on both ears for years. He does so in the bed of Annie Bouty, among others, and Brigitte Jenart. She is a dentist who held her consultations in a house at 35 rue de la Raad in Ixelles. This house will be at the centre of attention for several weeks in September 1996 because Neufchâteau started excavations there for the body of Loubna Benaïssa. There are reasons to regard this address as suspicious. A cab driver claims he dropped off Dutroux and Nihoul several times at this address.*7 It is also the home address of the paedophile Roland Corvillain, about whom testimonies circulated at the time that he had been behaving suspiciously at the time of Loubna's disappearance. Corvillain is a business associate of Serge Frantsevitch, who threw himself into all sorts of questionable business adventures through his small company Logitel. Corvillain will consistently deny any involvement in

the Dutroux case - nothing of the kind will ever be proven - but the names he associates with the house in rue de la Raad during his first interrogation make one's ears ring. Among others, he mentions Robert Darville, the firearm-obsessed member of the gang around Patrick Haemers, whom we also met in the dossier concerning the campsite murder in Oud-Heverlee. He often saw Haemers' father there. A bigwig from the electronics company Sabca apparently also had some business there, and of course, Frantsevitch, Nihoul, Bouty...*8

Brigitte Jenart, the dentist, completes the list. In 1983, she became acquainted with Juan Borges. She began a fleeting relationship with him and became embroiled in the constructions he set up with his other girlfriend, Annie Bouty. It gradually became clear to her that this was not exactly a kosher environment. Bouty made her sign forty affidavits by which she assumed custody of about as many Zaireans and Nigerians illegally residing in the country. One day, Borges dropped by, accompanying some godfather of the Italian mafia. There was talk of stolen gold, counterfeit dollars and drugs. Borges also made her sign some forms. With that, before she knew it, she was in debt to the tune of 7 million Belgian francs. When Bouty wanted to know how close the justice system was to Borges, Jenart remembers it took one phone call. Now and then, she would have it checked whether he was listed in the Central Signal database of the Belgian police.*9

For Brigitte Jenart, the Dutroux case ended dramatically. As a dentist, she specialised in treating children's teeth. After the inconclusive excavations in her house, she and her colleague lost almost all their customers. The neighbourhood was buzzing with rumours about the dental practice serving as a supply line for paedophilia networks. At the beginning of 1998, the flow of rumours seemed to have subsided, and Jenart dared to show herself on the street again. Then, precisely at the beginning of April, her body was found. The Brussels public prosecutor decided it was suicide. Her colleague, who now runs the practice on her own, will continue to doubt the cause of death was suicide. If only because Jenart did not even leave a farewell letter.

In the end, nothing will come of this book written by Nihoul. The day it is published, indeed his birthday, is also the day Marc Dutroux escaped from the courthouse in Neufchâteau and triggered a newsflash from Belgium on CNN. Numerous book merchants refused to put "Rumours and Facts" on their shelves, and after only a few days, it went into the clearance bin. The book did not contain the promised photographs of "people of interest." In fact, it has no substance and is merely a furious tirade against all the people Nihoul feels have put obstacles in his way - his son included.

By this time, Michel Nihoul has already become a caricature for the media, reliably furnishing the news with a juicy and easy-to-pick-up story. The turnaround in the image of the Neufchâteau suspect went smoothly and was partly facilitated by Virginie Baranyanka, his lawyer. Long before there could be any talk of anything like a trial, she had already acquitted Nihoul with flying colours. Baranyanka's knowledge of the Neufchâteau judicial dossier did not extend beyond the day the Liège KIB lifted the arrest warrant on her client in the Dutroux case, but that cannot prevent her from continuing to play the media for two years after that. She watches the news relayed to the press like a hawk. Nihoul has cancer. Nihoul thinks he will soon be released. Nihoul gets his computer back. Nihoul is writing a book. Nihoul does not have cancer after all. Whether it is all factual matters little. Baranyanka was the first to recognise the importance of the role of the press in this highly mediatised case, and she is taking advantage of it. Day after day, she manipulates the media to add a few brushstrokes to the image of the man who may have committed the occasional fraud - and which Belgian did not? - but whose involvement in the Dutroux case is based only on a regrettable misunderstanding. When Baranyanka unexpectedly receives the help of some detectives working for the Neufchâteau cell, things can't go wrong.

It is almost incomprehensible that Nihoul abruptly sacked Baranyanka. Because of a birth, she could not visit him in prison for several weeks. He finds this a weak argument. It is striking how many journalists exhaust themselves in praising the lawyer and, for the first time in a year and a half, write something negative about Nihoul. They predicted a golden future for Baranyanka at the bar and wondered what would happen to Nihoul. He has now been sentenced to one year in

prison for his part in the fraud case involving the catering company Maison des Chefs.*10

At the end of 1997, Michel Nihoul had only one real adversary left: Inspector Raymond Drisket of the National Judiciary Police Brigade. Connerotte is gone, Suys is gone, and De Baets and his men are gone. The number of detectives within the Obelix cell is at some point reduced to three, Drisket included. Langlois reacts glumly, uninterested almost, to any attempt by Drisket to show how Dutroux and Nihoul wanted to set up a prostitution network together since early 1996, how they bartered drugs and cars in their way, and how the child abductions can fit perfectly into that picture. The transfer of 1,000 XTC pills the day after Laetitia's abduction remains a significant clue in Drisket's eyes. Langlois doesn't even listen with half an ear. He refuses Drisket's permission to conduct any more investigative acts into Nihoul that aim at anything other than proving his involvement in child abductions. Gradually, for every procedural step Drisket has to take, he speaks to prosecutor Bourlet, who can demand investigative acts because of his position. This situation is not very healthy for the progress of the investigation. It so happens that the series of searches to verify Nihoul's alibi for August 8 1996, remains the subject of discussion for months.

`Langlois is rather fond of proper etiquette,' says one investigator. `I remember a coordination meeting from the early days, at which Eddy Suys was also present. The group consisted of two-thirds French speakers and the rest Flemish. Suys noticed the arrival of a colleague and had to talk to him briefly. He did so in Dutch. Langlois was furious and thought this showed a lack of respect. From that day on, Suys could do nothing right in his eyes. It was the same with De Baets' men. During meetings, they look like a mess. You must wear ties and starched pants to be in Langlois' good books. A shiny briefcase always helped, too. It may sound ridiculous, but that played a role at some crucial moments because the opponents of De Baets and Co did conform to the dress code.

Before the Dutroux case broke out, Langlois was a criminal judge at the court of first instance in Arlon. When he had to

replace Connerotte after the "spaghetti judgment", he initially decided to continue along the same lines. That did not last long. According to the investigators, it soon became apparent that Langlois wanted, above all, 'a defensible and preferably also simple dossier'.

It has been said that Langlois had links to the political party PSC in the past and, for that reason, had his investigations adjusted according to the prevailing political agenda', says the ex-detective. 'That seems an exaggeration to me. He did not feel much like shaking up the Belgian establishment with the X dossier. His big problem is that he does not reason like an investigating judge. He approaches the facts from the point of view of the sitting magistrate. For him, truth is only true when it can be argued with resounding evidence in a court of law.'

One of the people Langlois got along with simply because of his impeccable outfit was Commander Duterme. Little is known about the discreet Duterme. Although he is only halfway to forty, he is regarded as 'an old school type' within the gendarmerie. His career with the BOB had two relative highlights: the Nijvel gang and the Dutroux case. In the Gang file, Duterme headed a special task force of BOB and Judiciary Police in Nijvel from 1984 as a captain. From that position, Duterme was the loyal right hand of Nijvel prosecutor Jean Deprêtre. Deprêtre's record is one to be proud of. Wherever he goes, he leaves a scent of cover-ups behind. The Nijvel gang, the murder of Paul Latinus, the Pinon case, the Eurosystems case... In each of these cases, Deprêtre, in the name of "common sense", prevented the most elementary acts of investigation, ridiculed avenues of inquiry in the direction of organised crime, tried to reduce everything to the most banal hypothesis possible, and perpetrators were never found. Sometimes, it seems as if Deprêtre is doing it on purpose. From 1985 onwards, he stuck to the trail of the Borains, a gang of low-life criminals involved with Michel Cocu. In his eyes, that is the Nijvel gang. In 1988, the Assize Court of Mons acquitted the Borains. This happened after it appeared that Deprêtre, in his now legendary wisdom, had concealed ballistic expertise that showed the innocence of the Borains. By then, the Court of Cassation had already deprived the Nivelles

public prosecutor's office of the Gang dossier because Deprêtre was 'not working objectively'. However, the delay between 1984 and 1987 was more than enough to ensure that the Gang of Nivelles would never be caught.

At the time, two investigators at the Wavre BOB moved heaven and earth to persuade Deprêtre to follow other paths. Their names were Gérard Bihay and Frans Balfroid. They visited, among others, the (ex) gendarmes Madani Bouhouche, Robert Beijer, Christian Amory and others. Bihay and Balfroid were exonerated precisely the same way as De Baets and his men over a decade later. Even the methodology is identical, for at that time, too, there is talk of a 're-reading'. Captain Duterme may have been instructed to get rid of Bihay and Balfroid, but it remains a wry observation that so many years later, he, of all people, is assigned to lead the antenna-Neufchâteau. The man whom Duterme entrusts with this task is... Colonel Torrez, Nihoul's telephone buddy.

Duterme got along much better with some detectives within the Walloon Brabant cell. At some point, he brought in Didier Mievis, which is remarkable. A few years earlier, Mievis' name and four others had turned up in a report on the legendary Group G. This was a small group of extreme-right gendarmes closely linked to the Front de la Jeunesse. The existence of Group G was revealed in 1976 by the now-deceased former gendarme Martial Lekeu. According to him, the plan had been conceived within Group G to bring about a right-wing coup through terror - which might explain the raids of the Gang of Nivelles. During a 'mini investigation', it emerged not only that Mievis, then working for the CBO, belonged to Group G, but he also confessed to having passed internal gendarmerie files to Front de la Jeunesse leader Francis Dossogne. The General Staff of the gendarmerie seemed to think this was no big deal and seconded the man to the mobile brigade. No one knows how Mievis managed to return to the forefront in such a short time -the second Gang Commission asked many questions about this- but we do know that Mievis entered the Walloon Brabant cell as Duterme's secretary. Mievis was still maintaining contact with Dossogne during that period.

Commander Duterme became embroiled in several legal conflicts in 1998 with journalists and former Neufchâteau cell members. Time and again, mutual accusations of 'falsifications in the X1 dossier' will be the subject of complicated debates. Duterme himself does not have much to fear on that front. He always falls back on the work of his chief reader for any part of his argumentation.

Baudouin Dernicourt is in his late thirties. Throughout the various opinion groups that emerged after the X1 testimonies, his colleagues describe him as a 'super cop', as one of the very best that the financial section of the Brussels BOB ever had. Dernicourt is the prototype of the young left-wing rascal who, in the early eighties, starts his training as a gendarme with big ideas about 'change from within' and ends up as a weapons maniac with right-wing sympathies. At some point, a rumour circulated in the corridors of the antenna Neufchâteau that Dernicourt once belonged to the neo-Nazi Westland New Post and, in that context, participated in shooting exercises in the Bois de la Houssière. That is the forest where Bouhouche and Beijer also went for target practice and where a car used by the Nijvel gang was once found. Dernicourt will describe his alleged Westland New Post membership as fantasist gossip and is also taking legal action to complain about it.*11 The BOB officer's past is no less enigmatic. In 1985, he was found to use firearms illegally at a domain in Ruisbroek. A bullet he fired hit a car on the public road. The incident cost Dernicourt an investigation by the military auditorium, which pretty much dismissed the case by suspending him for only two days.

A second event marked Baudouin Dernicourt's wonder years: the theft of 816 kilograms of dynamite from a quarry in Ecaussines during the night of June 2 to 3, 1984. This is one of the great mysteries in investigating the extreme left-wing "Cellules Communistes Combattantes (CCC)." That organisation committed twenty-seven acts of terror between late 1984 and late '85 - mostly with expertly assembled explosives and, on one occasion, attacked in five places at once. If the Department of Justice is to be believed, the CCC

consisted of a handful of idealistic young people who, in their heyday, were especially lucky not to blow themselves up. Many observers continue to believe that the convicted leaders Pierre Carette, Bertrand Sassoie, Pascale Vandegeerde and Didier Chevolet were infiltrated and supported by the extreme right at the time, perhaps without realising it.

Shortly after the dynamite theft, Dernicourt and his friend were spotted in Ecaussines. They parked their car near the quarry and seemed to observe the police officers working there. 'Perhaps it was just his passion for the great criminal riddles of the time,' says an erstwhile acquaintance. 'The house where that friend lived was being watched at the time. When he got into trouble a year later because of that incident in Ruisbroek, everything pointed to the fact that his career in the gendarmerie was over. But strangely enough, it wasn't. He was quickly promoted and attained BOB status as early as 1989.'

There is also a third case that greatly concerned Dernicourt in 1984: the murder of Christine Van Hees in an old mushroom farm near the gendarmerie barracks where he was attending boot camp at the time. It is not clear what intrigued Dernicourt about this murder. He was obsessed with this murder and talked day in and day out about nothing else,' says the acquaintance of the time. If you heard him talk about it, it was no ordinary murder. He linked it to all kinds of topics. He placed this murder in the series of major criminal events that were taking place in Belgium at the time. At the end of the summer of 1984, in August or September, Baudouin was in a right state. Something had happened at a campsite where his girlfriend kept a caravan. He talked about an incident with a gas canister and interpreted it as an attempt to get rid of him. A few days later, he told me that he now "knew everything," that he had found out exactly what had happened, and would never talk about the mushroom case again. He never did speak about it ever again . '

Dernicourt prepared dozens of official reports on the Van Hees case in 1997 and '98 within the Neufchâteau cell. None of these documents show that he had any special prior knowledge of the case. It is plausible that Dernicourt, precisely because he followed the case so closely in 1984, can clearly

state from day one that X1 must be spouting nonsense. However, nothing indicates that he communicated this to his colleagues. Bizarre detail: ex-main suspect Serge Clooth once said that Christine Van Hees had heard someone talking about an imminent weapon robbery at a military barracks. During the night of 12 to May 13 1984, an actual commando-style raid was held on the arsenal of the "Ardennes Hunters" Belgian infantry commando brigade in Vielsalm. It is assumed that the CCC later used these weapons.

If a top three ranking of the most competent investigating judges in Belgium existed, Jean-Claude Van Espen would surely be in it. Once, he ordered a search of the Brussels Stock Exchange. He arrested the French businessman Didier Pineau-Valencienne. He brought leaders of the Walloon Socialist Party before the Court of Cassation because of the Union affair. He led the investigation against the corrupt Forest liberal alderman Bosschloos, the ex-chairman of the Socialist Party in Charleroi, against chief-swindler Carmelo Bongiorno, against some stooges of Baron Benoît de Bonvoisin, against the former Brussels substitute Claude Leroy... Few magistrates stood out as much as Van Espen during the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. He is often referred to as the "little judge". Discretion is a high priority for the fifty-year-old. He is described as a workhorse, a financial genius, and a paragon of what justice should be. The criticism of Van Espen, if any, comes mainly from people he has put in jail. Then, it is said that his appointment was promoted by the right wing of the PSC party - which is also true. From his position, Van Espen is said to be scouring for fraud and corruption in every direction, except among the establishment of the Belgian economy, such as the Societe Generale and the empire around Albert Frère.

It was never understood why Van Espen was assigned the investigation into the murder of Christine Van Hees in the fall of 1985. Francine Lyna is the prominent investigating judge who primarily handles juvenile cases and murder. And when this investigation - after Van Espen closed it in June 1996 - is reopened due to X1's testimony, it is perhaps expected, from a strictly legal logic, that he again takes charge of it. From the outside looking in, however, this is a questionable decision. In mid-October 1996, Raymond Drisket alluded to his colleagues

in Neufchâteau that 'something remarkable' was about to happen. On September 30, Drisket interrogated the Dinant BOB officer Gérard Vannesse again. Michel Nihoul played informant for him -with the known consequences- and now Vannesse suddenly wants to expose something he has kept silent on a previous occasion. Nihoul had promised him information, but never gave it, about a prostitution network run by an Antwerp restaurant owner, Vannesse says.

- Why are you only now talking about this restaurant owner?
- Because it came to mind while I was deliberating after my interrogation.
- I also remember that he spoke about the Brussels investigating judge Van Espen, who was protecting a paedophilia network, and that this case would cause a lot of commotion if it would float to the surface. That is all he told me about it.
- Why are you only speaking about this now?
- For the same reasons. Moreover, I did not believe it.*12

On pages 96 to 101 of the book, which Jean-Paul Raemaekers was writing in the prison of Arlon after the failed Jumet episode - and which was confiscated on June 25 1997, on the authority of Langlois -the name of Van Espen also appears several times, and in a much less veiled context than in Vannesse's statement. Also, one John M Verswyver, a former cellmate of Raemaekers, starts proclaiming to journalists at the beginning of 1997 that Van Espen is an active patron of paedophiles.*13 Verswyver, Raemaekers, Nihoul... they all have something in common: they were all apprehended by Van Espen. It is almost surprising that in the aftermath of the Dutroux case, no more of these characters accused their opponents within the magistracy of paedophilia. In January 1998, rumours emerged that X1 would have identified Van Espen as one of the individuals who attended the murder of Christine Van Hees...*14 The reality is less creepy. X1 had told her therapist a few weeks earlier that she had seen Van Espen a few times in the early 1980s 'in the company of Nihoul and Bouty'.*15

Of all the rumours about Van Espen in 1997, only one seems worthy of the detectives' attention: Vannesse's statement.

Michel Nihoul, however, makes a dismissive gesture when his interrogators confront him with it. He never phrased it like that. He had heard this from a lawyer. And when he mentioned it to Vannesse, it was more by way of anecdote, he explains. Nihoul can tell another story about Van Espen, though. He did so on October 18, 1996. The businessman is questioned that day about the SOS Sahel affair. This entire affair, Nihoul tells us, started as the result of another one—a complicated matter, as is always the case with Nihoul.

Due to a conflict between him and his son Jean-Marc Nihoul, the latter had unknowingly filed the balance sheets of their joint company, Nihoul et associés with the Commercial Court. Trustee Claire Massart had the assets seized, and a forged bank certificate was discovered in the name of PSC politician Philippe Deleuze. The latter managed the financial assets of an incapacitated person and had briefly 'borrowed' 150,000 francs, as Nihoul puts it in his book.*16 Deleuze had come to beg him to help him find a document showing that the 150,000 francs were safely stored somewhere. After all, the Justice of the Peace was about to inspect his accounts. Nihoul then created a false certificate on his newly purchased colour printer showing that Deleuze had invested the money in Luxembourg. Via the curator, this certificate ended up on Espen's desk. On January 17, 1989, the Brussels BOB searched Nihoul's office in the Van Halenlaan in Vorst.*17 Nihoul was not present but was ordered to present himself to the BOB the day after. 'Then I contacted Deleuze and informed him of what had happened,' Nihoul recounts. 'I reminded him that this case was related to the forgery he had asked me for. In response, he told me not to go to the appointment. He would contact his brother-in-law Jean-Claude Van Espen and ask him to reschedule the appointment so that we could meet to come up with a strategy for this affair.'*18

It turns out that Van Espen, according to Nihoul, arranged things so that he only had to submit to an interrogation a day later, making Deleuze's false bank certificate disappear from the investigation. Subsequently, the investigation was handed over to Benoît Dejemeppe, who was still an investigating judge and was only interested in the unsavoury business at SOS Sahel. There is no longer any mention of Deleuze's fraud. He

was upheld by Van Espen, according to Nihoul. It is Nihoul's word against that of two prominent magistrates. One element in his story is absolutely correct. Van Espen was indeed the brother-in-law of Deleuze in 1989. This is no honour, as Deleuze was later convicted of about a hundred fraud cases, amounting to more than 50 million Belgian francs.*19

The connection between Van Espen and the corrupt milieu of Nihoul, Bouty and Deleuze seems to go even deeper. 'I got to know Van Espen when, as a lawyer, he occasionally worked for the law firms of Annie Bouty and Philippe Deleuze,' said Nihoul during his October 8, 1996 interrogation. 'The sister of Van Espen, by the way, is my son's godmother.'*20 Nihoul also explains that Van Espen owes his appointment as investigating judge to the support of Paul Vanden Boeynants and Philippe Deleuze.

Belgium is a small country. If you start counting the siblings of Godmothers and Fathers, maybe everyone is related to everyone else.*21 In the case of Van Espen, however, there is more. On December 27, 1997, the weekly *Télé Moustique* published a copy of a court document on the appearance of Annie Bouty before the Brussels Council Chamber in response to some complaints she had filed against Nihoul. The document is dated June 20 1984, four months after the murder on the mushroom farm. The record bears the name of Bouty's lawyer, Jean-Claude Van Espen.

On March 5 1997, the remains of Loubna Benaïssa were discovered in the Q8 garage of the Derochette family. After the Benaïssa family had started a civil case in Neufchâteau in September 1996, a team of young gendarmes from Brussels, led by Sergeant Legendre, was entrusted with analysing the dossier on the nine-year-old girl who disappeared in Ixelles on August 5 1992. Six months before the search of the garage basement, Patrick Derochette is already at the top of the list of suspects, not only because of his judicial past but mainly because of Aziza EM, a classmate of little Loubna. Thirteen days after the disappearance, she saw a black VW Golf driving by in Ixelles, and she thought she had recognised her friend in the back seat. The girl was so sure of herself that she wrote the license plate on her arm: FKE080. The Brussels Judiciary

Police had already checked the license plate in 1992 but discovered cars that were anything but a VW Golf and owners who were anything but child kidnappers. When, in March 1997, the gendarmerie can show off Derochette's arrest, a spokeswoman did not hesitate to mention the brilliant inspiration that had brought Legendre to Derochette. He assumed that Aziza might have mistaken an H for a K. As it turned out, the combination FHE080 was registered to a certain C, who owned two identical VW Golfs between 1987 and 1996, one white and one light green. C was an in-law relative of the Derochettes. Patrick Derochette's brother drove a black VW Golf at the time.*22 In Legendre's view, it was perfectly possible that the license plates were swapped within the family. Whether it actually happened that way has never been proven. According to Derochette, Loubna had already died on August 18, 1992, so Aziza could not have caught sight of her anymore. The gendarmerie never revealed the identity of the mysterious Mr C. The situation is also embarrassing. C is none other than the clerk of examining magistrate Jean-Claude Van Espen.*23

This is the factually observable situation on January 27, 1997, the day Van Espen was again appointed as the leader of the investigation into the murder of Christine Van Hees; the dossier described in those days as the prologue to the major breakthrough in the Dutroux case. In the months before, the investigating judge had repeatedly complained about the excessive number of detectives involved in the Dutroux case. He has family ties to two suspects in the murder case he is supposed to be investigating. He had previously acted as a lawyer for one of those suspects. He owes his appointment to the political milieu targeted in this investigation. In the previous phase of the investigation he led, all traces pointing toward Nihoul or the environment around him were simply ignored.

Van Espen's appointment as investigating judge in the Van Hees dossier came three months after the entire nation revolted because the Court of Cassation removed Jean-Marc Connerotte from the Dutroux case because of a plate of spaghetti. Van Espen must have always known that the Van Hees dossier would put him in a similar situation sooner or

later and that the grounds for a legitimate suspicion of bias would be a hundred times more solid. Just before the press proved his links with Bouty at the end of 1997, Van Espen still formally denied that he had ever been her lawyer: 'That is pertinently untrue; I have never defended Annie Bouty.' Confronted with the exact references of the document, Van Espen says: 'Maybe I defended her once, to replace another lawyer. That could be, yes.'²⁴ Ten days later, he withdrew from the investigation and was succeeded in the Van Hees dossier by his colleague Damien Vandermeersch.'²⁵

Suppose if one scrutinised Van Espen's activities between May and July 1997: in that case, you will search long and fruitlessly for anything like an initiative or an attempt to make even some progress in finding the killers of Christine Van Hees. So, what does he do? He writes letters. And he was calling Marc Verwilghen to account when his committee appeared interested in the Van Hees file.

'It was as if a bomb had exploded', Verwilghen describes in his memoirs how mid-1997, he was summoned by the examining magistrate, assisted by prosecutor Dejemeppe and substitute Somers. They told me in no uncertain terms that they did not want the Commission to interfere in the case.'²⁶

On 26 May 1997, Van Espen addressed a long, wide-ranging letter to Dejemeppe. He complained - again - about the lack of investigators for the financial dossiers and talks about an 'alarming situation'. In this letter, Van Espen utters his surprise that a 'reading' of the statements of X1 is underway and that additional investigators have already been mobilised. 'Personally, I have not formulated any question regarding these reinforcements,' said Van Espen.²⁷ Gendarmerie colonel Guido Torrez, who received a copy of the letter to Dejemeppe on his desk, makes it understood that - indeed - it was not Van Espen who ordered the re-reading after all, but he shouldn't play ignorant either: 'The need for objectification (of X1's statements) was announced and justified during the coordination meeting of 25 April, in which you yourself participated.'²⁸

In early June, Van Espen changed tack. He formally instructed First Sergeant Bille to compile a folder of press clippings that appeared in the newspapers to report on a session of the Verwilghen Commission.*29 At the start of its second round, the commission questioned Bourlet and the national magistrates Duinslaeger and Vandoren, among others, behind closed doors. Van Espen hoped to learn from the press clippings whether the X-dossiers were discussed and how much of the dossier had trickled down to the press. If so, he reasons he is stuck with a leak, which is inadmissible. Now, the leaks are not too bad. The only thing that might indicate that the X-dossiers were discussed within the committee is an article in the La Lanterne newspaper. It describes how Bourlet reacted when Philippe Castel of RTL-TVi shoved a microphone under his nose and almost begged if he could not then make a small, brief statement. To which Bourlet: 'But of course. Good day.' However, something else in the article interests Van Espen much more: a quote from PS commissioner Eerdeken. The latter talks about 'significant testimonies', which the magistrates are said to have discussed.*30 A leak, after all. And again, Claude Eerdeken.

On June 10, 1997, Van Espen set about writing letters again. This time, national magistrate Patrick Duinslaeger is the addressee. Van Espen is now complaining about the book "Les Cahiers d'un Commissaire" by Patrick Moriau (PS), who resigned from the Verwilghen Commission. The fact that Moriau quotes verbatim from testimonies behind closed doors indicates that nothing will ever come of his investigation. If he ever has to have people arrested or accused, they will claim their rights violated. At the same time, also referring to the quotation from Eerdeken, Van Espen now states: 'I have to conclude that there does seem to have been interference, to the extent that I see myself obliged to suspend various

investigation assignments, pending clarification.*31

Moriau has carefully navigated around the X-witnesses in his book. Eerdeken's statement is not exactly of the most revealing nature either. It seems Van Espen merely wanted a solid leak to shut down the investigation. That goal is finally achieved through a lot of correspondence with Commander

Dutermé about the previously described connection between Adjutant De Baets and Counselor Marique. In between, Dutermé sends one note after another out into the world, questioning De Baets' investigative methods.

Another element stands out in reconstructing this legal Stratego game. In the crucial month of June 1997, the gravity of the X1 files is not an issue. The credibility of X1 is hardly mentioned in the letters from and to Van Espen, and the staggering findings in the Van Hees file certainly are not. This is purely about procedures. The fact that a parliamentary inquiry was underway is why Jean-Claude Van Espen put the judicial inquiry 'temporarily' on hold. Conversely, a judicial inquiry prevented the Verwilghen Commission from looking into it. The result is that there is no more investigation at all. Only re-readings.

NOTES:

1. On December 31, 1996, he was sentenced to 3 years in prison for fraud with the non-profit organisation SOS Sahel. Nihoul made off with at least 5 million francs intended for aid to Third World countries.
2. Raf Sauviller and Danny Ilegems in Humo, September 30, 1997.
3. Non-execution search mandate, National Brigade Judicial Police, March 3, 1997, PV 10.149.
4. This was done at the request of Marc Verwilghen.
5. Second report of the Verwilghen Commission, section 4: The network of relations around Nihoul, part 5.1.4.
6. The Justice Department is more zealous about the painting than about the murder, which may be because the owner offered a premium of 2 million francs. A 'tipster' from the Brussels Judicial Police pocketed this premium.
7. Interrogation B.J., Brussels police, 28 November 1996, PV 50.843.
8. Interrogation Roland Corvillain, BOB Brussels, September 7 1996, PV 114.148.
9. Interrogation Brigitte Jenart, GP national brigade, 27 January 1997, PV 10.050.
10. Judge Michel Degève deliberately punished Nihoul mildly 'because according to the letter of the law, he should already have been free'. He would still be in prison only

- under pressure of public opinion, says the judge. After his conviction, Nihoul announced that he would appeal.
11. Baudouin Dernicourt complained against unknown persons for slander and defamation, November 24, 1997, note number BR.52.66.112787/97.
 12. Interrogation of Gérard Vannesse, national brigade Judicial Police, September 30, 1996, PV 10.514.
 13. This comes to the attention of the public prosecutor of Neufchâteau via a lady who, rather shocked by what she hears from Verswyver, contacts Neufchâteau. Brussels BOB, February 11, 1997, PV 150.384.
 14. On January 15 1998, the weekly Le Soir Illustré wrote: 'What role does the anonymous pseudo-witness X1 play, since very recently she was made to declare that examining magistrate Van Espen was present at the murder of Christine Van Hees in the mushroom farm?'
 15. After Regina Louf mentions during a conversation that she has seen Van Espen before, her therapist calls De Baets, who was transferred to the financial section in November 1997. He draws up a report of the conversation. On the therapist's authority, Van Espen's presence at the murder is effectively mentioned. Regina Louf later blames this on a misunderstanding.
 16. Rumours and Facts, Michel Nihoul, Dark & Light Publication, 1998.
 17. One of the detectives is Eddy Verhaegen, who succeeded Adjutant De Baets as X1's interrogator and is also involved in the re-readings.
 18. Interrogation of Michel Nihoul, National Brigade Judicial Police, October 18, 1996, PV 10.554.
 19. The Brussels correctional court sentenced Philippe Deleuze to 30 months of conditional imprisonment on June 27, 1996.
 20. Interrogation of Michel Nihoul, Judiciary Police national brigade, 8 October 1996, PV 10.543.
 21. The sister of Van Espen, through whom the family ties run towards Deleuze, has since divorced.
 22. Determinations gendarmerie Brussels, 26 November 1996, PV 115.123.
 23. Synthesis report 'Patrick Derochette', gendarmerie Brussels, 6 January 1997, PV 100.281.
 24. De Morgen, December 26, 1997.

25. The document by which Télé Moustique demonstrated that van Espen was Annie Bouty's lawyer at the time is dated June 20, 1984. On January 8, 1998, the Brussels public prosecutor's office spokesman explained Van Espen's resignation and stated in a condescending tone that this happened only once. He mentioned another date: December 13, 1983. From this, we can conclude that Van Espen acted as Bouty's counsel more than once.
26. Behind the scenes of the Dutroux Commission. Memoirs of Marc Verwilghen, Danny Ilegems and Raf Sauviller, Atlas, 1999.
27. Letter from Van Espen to Dejemeppe, 26 May 1997.
28. Letter from gendarmerie colonel Torrez to Van Espen, 1 July 1997, No. Jud/70379001/M.
29. Side letter Jean-Claude Van Espen, June 4, 1997.
30. La Lanterne, June 4, 1997. In his PV, Bille draws particular attention to this clipping. BOB Brussels, June 5, 1997, PV 151,867.
31. Letter from Van Espen to Duinslaeger, 10 June 1997.

4. 'I don't think we ever had a chance to talk about those things.'

Regina Louf's response when Van Hees's mother asked her if Christine ever talked about a trip to Canada; 3 March 1998.

A dog has four legs. So does a table. Therefore, a dog is a table. By this kind of reasoning, one is taught the meaning of

sophistry. It is the art of astute fallacy, as developed by Greek philosophers in the fifth century BC. You can think of endless variations. A man wants to take the train from point A to point B but misses the train. He will never reach point B. Sophists do not consider the option of catching a later train. Sophism still has its adepts today, as is evident from the fourth report of re-reading.

Brussels, 05.02.98.

Synthesis and comments after re-reading the proceedings and revising the videotaped interrogations from 14 to 17. This synthesis confirms the findings of the three previous syntheses as regards the facts and elements presented by X1 during her interrogations.

1. Observations:

Interrogation 14 of 01.02.1997 is related to the events at the mushroom farm. The interrogations 15 to 17 concern other facts. The interrogations concern criminal acts that are said to have taken place in a castle in the Antwerp region where, among others, Katrien De Cuyper is said to have been murdered. Since the previous synthesis, many verifications have been carried out due to the suggestions made.

Investigations into the identification of the victims quoted by X1, Belinda and Mieke (Marie-Thérèse) led us to X1's immediate surroundings, to two individuals who frequented the same riding school as her. The description given by X1 could correspond to Mieke Van De Walle or her sister, Chris Van De Walle. As for Belinda, it could refer to Van Achte Belinda.

Newly scheduled interrogations should confirm or refute this hypothesis.

X1 formally recognised the riding school "Paddock" in the Strooistraat 14 in Meise. She claims this is the location of the murder of her son Tiu on 13 February 1984. However, several details mentioned by X1, in her statements to identify the scene, make us think of the riding school Ponderosa. X1 frequented this riding school between June 1983 and November 1984 (see PV 152.769 of 30.12.1997 and 150.130 of 21.01.1998).

As for the facts alleged to have taken place in a villa where she noticed many models of boats, X1 formally recognised the villa of the named FS after she was shown a photo during her interrogation on 08.02.1997 (see PV 150.322/97 of 27.02.1997).

X1 names FS as a perpetrator of abuse and provides a precise depiction of him for recognition in the photo. We note that the description given by X1 during her interrogation does not correspond to this person, nor to his wife, whom she subsequently recognised after the presentation of photographs (see PV 150.188/98 on 28.01.1998.).

As a result of X1's statements about her various undeclared pregnancies, an examination was conducted with a gynaecologist from that period. The examination results were given to Investigating Judge Vandermeersch within the framework of his dossier 6/98.

X1's statements identified the family doctor, S. (see PV 150.741 of 18.03.1997).

The photo identifications of C and K show that they were born in 1976. So, they were 6-7 years old at the time of the facts (cf. PV 150.164/98), which makes their presence impossible. Because of the concrete details mentioned by X1 concerning Christine (t-shirt, teddy bear, bicycle, etc.), many individuals were interrogated (see report 152.710/97, dated 22.12.1997).

Content of interrogations 14 to 17:

a. Interrogation 14 on 01.02.1997. This interrogation is based on the details concerning the murder of Van Hees Christine. X1 gives us details about Mieke, who allegedly participated in sex parties. X1 also explains the ties between Mieke and Christine.

Observations:

When talking about the character Mieke, X1 mentioned a Brussels educational institution she attended where wearing the school uniform was obligatory. Based on the description of this uniform, we find a similar coat of arms on an equestrian vest worn by X1 (see PV 152.711/97 dated 29.12.1997).

Based on X1's statements, An's parents were identified as DE and SE (see PV 100.452/97, dated 16.01.1997).

We draw attention to the fact that X1 seems uncertain and finds it difficult to offer precise details about the facts that took place at the mushroom farm. She usually tries to obtain information to provide more details. For example, when the investigators inform X1 that they have a blueprint of the mushroom farm, she asks them to look at it to jog her memory. When the detectives refuse to do so, she evades the request to provide a clear as possible description of the location. The detectives are not fooled and inform her they cannot show her this information because it would become suggestive. In this last interrogation, concerning the facts in the mushroom farm, we note the presence of many contradictions with her previous interrogations regarding the same subject. In the annexe, we provide a comparative table of the various interrogations concerning the facts in the mushroom farm. This table clearly shows the stated contradictions.

b. Hearing 15 on 08.02.1997.

This interrogation is based on a new fact, because of the photo recognition of De Cuyper Katrien by X1. She recognises De Cuyper Katrien among many pictures of disappeared children shown to her. The identification of De Cuyper Katrien took place outside the interrogation and is the subject of official report 150.067/97 dated 02.02.1997. In this stack of photographs, X1 identified other children who became victims of the network.

X1 describes the circumstances in which she knew De Cuyper Katrien.

X1 explains that she was coerced by the fact that her children were being held hostage by a third person (a 'watchdog', to use X1's expression) as part of the events.

X1 has difficulty situating the facts in time. She mentions a route to get to the location of the events and provides a concise description of the place, how the crime happened, and the victim.

Observations:

X1 describes De Cuyper Katrien as a young girl of 12, while she was 15 at the time of the facts.

X1 specifies that on the day of the murder, Tony came to pick her up at her home, Nekkervijverstraat in Sint-Amandsberg, in a grey Citroën. We have to conclude that between De Cuyper Katrien's disappearance and when she was found dead, X1 was no longer domiciled at this address (see PV 150.184/98 dated 02.02.1998). Naatje van Zwaren de Zwarensstein (see PV 150.069/97, 02.02.1997)

We also draw attention to the fact that interesting statements were made during the recorded breaks of the interrogations. The confidential conversation between X1 and her therapist could be significant for this case. X1 regularly asks the investigators if her interrogation is going well and if they find her talkative enough. She confides in her therapist that she does not want to answer the questions because she thinks there is a specific purpose behind each question. She avoids answering the question if she does not know the goal. X1 specifies that Tony imposed this way of thinking on her at the time. X1 reveals that she carries a terrible anger within her, to the extent that she is obliged to hurt herself to control this anger. She adds that sometimes someone must control her because she could go so far as to smash her children's heads against the wall. She hastens to clarify that she has never hit her children.

c. Hearing 16 on date of 15.02.1997.

This interrogation is based on the facts concerning De Cuyper Katrien. X1 provides details that should allow us to locate the events.

X1 specifies that Tony restrained her and that she had no choice.

Observations:

We draw attention to certain contradictions in this interrogation. When the detectives ask her to repeat the names of the individuals present at the castle, X1 forgets two. The detective then reminds her that she spoke about De Wolf. We observe that the detective was mistaken because X1 never actually mentioned De Wolf in the previous interrogation but did mention a Van Mol. We also

note that X1 does not contradict the detectives and does not correct her mistake. X1 apologises and immediately switches to adding details, such as the fact that it is De Wolf who brought her back with his Jeep. Without including Y, whom she had forgotten entirely during this interrogation.*1

We notice contradictions in this same interrogation, such as X1, who tells us that Katrine had to know Tony since she knew, without being told, what Tony liked during blowjobs (...). In this same interrogation, X1 specified that it was the first time she saw Katrien and that Katrien gave a blowjob to everyone except Tony.

The castle has been identified. It is the Kattenhof in 's Gravenwezel (see PV 150.673/97 on 08.03.1997, 150.801/97 on 13.03.1997, and 150.359/97 on 01.03.1997). It is owned by the family X.

During the breaks of this interrogation, we also noted that X1 communicated specific details from the dossier to her therapist.

d. Hearing 17 on date of 01.03.1997.

X1 specifies the facts concerning De Cuyper Katrien for us. In this interrogation, X1 confirms the recognition of the Kattenhof castle as the location where De Cuyper Katrien was murdered.

X1 mentions other facts that would have taken place in the castle:

1) The facts with Katrien.

2) End of 1993 facts: with a Turkish or Moroccan girl spoken about in the press. The investigators put forward the name of Loubna Benaïssa. X1 confirms.

3) After 1993, facts on a boy of 7 and a girl of 11, whom X1 recognises as being Kim and Ken.

4) At the end of August 1994, facts on three children, including a small boy of 3 or 4 years and two girls, one of whom is called Véronique.

5) Facts about a girl aged 15 to 16 on 05.06.1995.

At the end of the interrogation, when the detectives assume that the immigrant girl must be Loubna Benaïssa, X1 confirms this. The detectives add that X1 recognised another child of foreign origin in the batch of pictures,

including De Cuyper. X1 specifies that this child was murdered on an estate.

Observations:

We note several contradictions with her previous interrogations on the same facts regarding her claim that she went to the castle 3 or 4 times. X1 subsequently claimed she was there 15 to 20 times.

Concerning the new facts introduced during this interrogation, X1 was questioned no further. We also note that none of the latest victims cited by X1 during this interrogation were identified in this dossier.

As for the other foreign girl identified by X1, she was recognised as Mazibas.

We also note that X1 limited herself to quoting names but never gave the slightest details about the course of events. Attached is a comparative table of the different hearings about the facts committed in Antwerp against De Cuyper Katrien. The contradictions are revealed.

Conclusions:

Apart from the fact that X1 gives us no verifiable details, we are confronted with a constantly evolving account in which she contradicts her previous statements about the same points.

The result of the few possible verifications based on X1's statements leaves us with a tangle of inconsistencies with the events that have transpired. We repeat below only non-exhaustive examples:

- 1) In the PV 150.182/98 of 29.01.1998, we show a chronology of the babies X1 delivered.
- 2) In the official report 150.181/98 dated 28.01.1998, we reiterate a blatant fabrication: during her interrogations, X1 states that she saw Tony for the last time on 05.06.1995. In her diary, we find a writing dated 09.08.1994 indicating that she had not seen Tony for a long time.
- 3) We note that X1 uses elements from her life, family environment and reading to reflect the story she tells us about her past. In PV 150.133/98 on 26.01.1998, we draw attention to the fact that in a fax on 16.03.1997, X1 mentions the existence of a small Vietnamese boy of 11 years, whom she presents to us as a victim of sexual abuse.

We see a correlation with a newspaper article dated 14.03.1997, found during a search of her home. It

mentions a little Vietnamese boy of 11 years who was abducted and abused by Derochette Patrick. In the police report 103.011/97 dated 01.09.1997, issued by the BOB of Ghent, it appears that most of the first names of the abuse victims cited by X1 can be found in her school circle. The individuals designated by X1 as victims and interviewed by the services of the BOB in Ghent and Brussels do not corroborate X1's statements about their involvement in a paedophilia network.

4) Tasks at hand

Interrogations 15 and 16.

As per the decision of the examining magistrate, a possible retranscription of the filmed interruptions of the interrogations will be carried out.

Vandeput W, Verhaegen E., Ooms B., Alvarez C., For agreement, Dernicourt B. 1MDC.

Let's start with this perfect illustration of contemporary sophistry. X1 writes in her diary in August 1994 that she has not seen Tony for a long time. 'Flagrant contradiction', says the rereader. At the end of 1996, X1 stated that she had last seen Tony on 5 June 1995. Sophists do not consider possible encounters between August '94 and June '95.

One cannot simply dismiss the fourth report because it contains mainly false data. It dates from after the first publications about X1 in the press, and the impression arises that these have encouraged the authors to be more diligent. At the same time, their task became easier. This re-reading phase is the turn of the reports from February to March 1997, the last four by De Baets. He was under pressure to start producing "results" at this time. As we have already seen, this affected the course of the interrogations. He had become less and less of an investigator and more and more of a crutch for Regina Louf. This evolution may be understandable, but in a

judicial inquiry, it is difficult to justify telling people at random that you witnessed the murders of Loubna Benaïssa and Kim and Ken Heyrman - just to please the interrogator.

`Hang on a minute, I never said that,' Regina Louf retorts. 'I remember that interrogation well. I talked about a Turkish girl with glasses. De Baets pressed me on the matter. Was it perhaps not a Moroccan girl? Was I sure about the glasses? Couldn't it have been Loubna? Could be, I answered. How they interrogated me made me think they knew more and expected something. In that context, I let slip something like, "It's possible."*2

If that's true, the rereaders started another round of fabrications. This is something entirely different from "X1 confirms". What does a look at the court documents reveal? `One of the girls might have been Loubna', we read in the first official report about the 1 March 1997 interrogation.*3 This could be. However, it does not say that X1 confirms anything. It becomes even more curious when she mentions Kim and Ken. According to the rereaders, on 1 March, X1 stated unequivocally that she witnessed the murder of the two children. `But no, not at all,' says Regina Louf. `I spoke of a brother and a sister. Outside an interrogation, De Baets asked me once whether they could have been Kim and Ken. I told him: That's possible, I don't know.'

We return to the dossiers. As far as we can tell, the names Kim and Ken do not even appear in the text of this interrogation. They are mentioned, however, just like Loubna's name, in two memos that De Baets drafted during this period to defend himself against the growing scepticism of Commander Duterme - especially during the discussions about the use of the "goniometer".*4 The rereaders might have a point when they observe that a lot of name-juggling seemed to have occurred during this period. Factually, they are wrong.

At the end of the report, we encounter an argument that raises serious questions. While searching X1's house on 20 March 1997, the investigators found a 6-day-old copy of *Het Laatste Nieuws* newspaper.*5 The newspaper devoted two entire pages to some unsolved murders that could be connected to

the recently arrested Patrick Derochette. The newspaper mentions the Van Hees case, among others. It was not unusual for Regina Louf to have kept this newspaper. Nine days later, Derochette kidnapped an eleven-year-old Vietnamese boy. In the basement of the garage, on the corner of the Kroonlaan and the Wérystraat, the boy was tortured (among other things, with wires, rods and fire), which resembles Christine Van Hees' ordeal.*6

On 16 March, two days after this appeared, X1 sent a fax to De Baets in which she talks about the events in 'the factory'. A Vietnamese boy named 'Ko' who came from a shelter appears in her account. Contrary to the rereader's assertion, X1 does not speak of a boy of eleven but ten years old. It is of little consequence. It seems evident that she drew inspiration from the newspaper, although she can maintain that this message evoked memories of another victim. But regarding fair evidence, that's all we have—C and K's birth year, 1976, had been known for over a year. That something is not right in the dates X1 mentioned about the births of her children was already mentioned in the previous report. That nobody from Christine Van Hees' environment can remember anything about a teddy bear of the Heart to Heart type is also old news - although further analysis of the twenty-four hearings about this shows that someone from Christine Van Hees' environment did emerge and who thought he knew that she possessed such a

teddy bear.*7 And, of course, the rereaders did not mention this.

The report also unapologetically states that none of the co-victims named by X1 could confirm her statements. Therefore, this disregards Conny De Windt, Myriam Verstraeten, Nora De Boodt, and several other privileged witnesses mentioned in the Ghent dossier. If you play on words, you can maintain that Natania DB and Sami A have not corroborated anything. The reality is that they have said nothing at all.

Then again, one of the more plausible findings relates to the whereabouts of Regina Louf at the time of the murder of Katrien De Cuyper. During her interrogations, she says that Tony V came to pick her up at her residence in the Nekkervijverstraat, which later turned out that she was no longer living there at the time. What sounds good is not necessarily pertinent. Regina Louf and Erwin Beeckman lived at five addresses between 1989 and 1997. Louf also stated that she had to visit the castle several times, so the dates and locations could potentially be correct after all.

Some parts seem impressive but are not at all. The fact that during the interrogation of 15 February 1997, X1, when listing the perpetrators, whispers that Mr De Wolf was never mentioned until then -and immediately confirms wholeheartedly that he "was there too"- doesn't make any sense. It is evident to any attentive reader that this is about a man she referred to by his first name on 8 February. If there is indeed no trace of the surname De Wolf in the transcription of the interrogation of 8 February, it does turn up in the notes made by Sergeant Danny De Pauw.*8 This means that X1 must have talked about this man when the camera was not recording.

Then: a contradiction. It's a 'flagrant contradiction' even if the rereaders are to be believed. During her interrogation on 15 February, X1 states that 'Catherine' must have known Tony. She says the girl knew how to carry out certain sexual acts and what he liked. The rereaders note that at the end of this interrogation, X1 specifies that 'Catherine' had to give everyone a blowjob except Tony at one point. From what, then, could X1 have noticed that she knew Tony? Nice find. The problem is that no excerpt of the interrogation can infer that it was impossible for 'Catherine' to satisfy Tony orally earlier in the day.

The best bit of re-reading lies in the passage about the riding school "Paddock" in Meise. According to the rereaders, X1 does not describe that riding school; instead, she described the Ponderosa, where she went horseback riding as a teenager in Destelbergen. When reading the descriptions X1 offers about 'that riding school on the outskirts of Brussels', one notices immediately that the central part of her situation sketch

concerns stables, wooden fences, earthen roads, etc... which fits the description of pretty much every equestrian centre in the world. However, in the category of equestrian centres where Michel Nihoul kept a horse, where the private driver of the top politician mentioned by X1 was also a regular visitor, and which were the subject of a judicial investigation after complaints of indecency, there is only one: The Paddock in Meise.*9

The rereaders are eager to insinuate this: at the public prosecutor's office in Neufchâteau, they have known since the end of August 1996 that Nihoul once had a horse at the riding school in Meise. The magistrates are supposed to infer that the interrogators must have 'helped her a little'. That is a sensible hypothesis, but concrete facts do not support it. Patriek De Baets was not present when detectives toured the outskirts of Brussels with X1 on 11 December 1996 and ended up in The Paddock using her directions. But BOB Danny De Pauw was present, who later chose the camp of the rereaders and will report any suspicion of influence by De Baets to his superiors. He has nothing to say about the search for the riding school. It is straightforward. X1 accused Nihoul and his friends of abusing her in an equestrian centre and located it. Investigation revealed that Nihoul did indeed have a horse there.*10 The only thing the rereaders have to comment on next is the description of X1 'makes one think of' of the Ponderosa. That is what they write: "makes one think of".

Photographs of X1 on horseback, discovered during the search, gave the rereader even more inspiration. On 1 February 1997, she describes Mieke as having no siblings, divorced parents from Brussels, semi-long blond hair in a ponytail, and one meter seventy tall. She loved jazz, roller skating and biking. Her mother was a call girl. X1 saw Mieke a few times in her school uniform: blue pleated skirt up to the knees, white blouse or dark blue sweater, white stockings, dark blue vest with an embroidered coat of arms of the school in a lot of green and some gold stitching. Among a stack of photos confiscated from X1, the rereaders have stumbled upon an image showing X1 in the outfit of the Ponderosa riding school. They have three photos enlarged and find that her vest

is also dark blue and that the coat of arms embroidered on it is also green.

The impetus for redirecting the X1 dossier sometimes hides in small corners. The separate official report that the rereaders prepared on their discovery pretty much asserts that school uniforms with dark blue vests were highly exceptional. It states that 'to this day, we still have not found the school where the students wore uniforms as described by X1'.*11

In their search for Mieke herself, the rereaders in early 1998 are still at the stage of 'could be' and now suddenly touch on the fact that it also 'could be' about a certain Chris. At this point, it seems that all blond women who have ever crossed the path of X1 are potential Miekes. Belinda is new to the list of matches, whose namesake the rereaders have found in the distant family of Regina Louf. Belinda 'could be' as well. The name Belinda surfaced in a fax in which she listed more than fifty first names in late December 1996.

Even when X1 recognises a dignitary individual not mentioned in the media, it is unacceptable. On 27 February 1996, in a photograph showing several other people, she points out the villa's owner on the outskirts of Brussels, where certain movies were made and where she remembers seeing models of boats everywhere. It is about Mr FS. According to the fourth report of re-reading, she may have recognised the man in the photo, but the photo shows a very different kind of person from the one described by X1. Chief rereader Baudouin Dernicourt has taken a personal interest in this matter. X1 first spoke of a skinny man 'in his forties' who wore glasses and whose wife was younger than him. In reality, FS is now 67, Dernicourt now notes. That is absolutely, unmistakably so. However, X1 recounts events from 1983, and anyone who can do math can determine that he was 53 at the time. That is already quite close to 'in the forties'. It remains to be seen how you can expect a child of fourteen to guess the correct age of an adult in that age category. Dernicourt also notes that the wife of FS was 'merely' four years younger than the dignitary in question.*12 He does not mention either in the report of re-reading or in his separate official report that X1 had pointed out the villa of FS a few months earlier and that her itinerary was correct in every detail at the time.*13 He also fails to mention that the gendarmerie monitored ES twice in early

March 1997. He was tracked to a fancy private club in the centre of Brussels where a car belonging to the company of the businessman S, identified by X1 as the culprit, was also parked.*14

Withholding vital information from leading magistrates is the common thread in the fourth report. It says the family doctor of the Louf family has been identified. That can't have taken much effort. X1 had mentioned the name months earlier and added that her parents had never allowed him to diagnose any pregnancies or injuries. The doctor from Laarne, who was in charge of medical supervision at school in the early eighties, might have been able to talk about that. He has unfortunately passed away. His son burned his father's files against all legal requirements. The report of re-reading makes no mention of this.*15 An analysis of Regina Louf's diary from 1989 aided detectives in identifying the names of three doctors or gynaecologists she visited during that period.*16 The report doesn't say a word about that either.

The attentive reader will recall that the rereadings were meant to "objectify" X1's testimony. Something or someone must have told the rereaders that their job was to eavesdrop on conversations between the witness and the psychologist and judge whether the witness was a good mother. What she mentioned during the break in the interrogation about her inner aggression almost sounds like a suggestion to remove Regina Louf's custody of her children. And that was the fourth and final re-reading.

The last chance to arrive at an objective investigation expired in January 1998. Investigating judge Van Espen is replaced by his colleague Damien Vandermeersch. The latter briefly toyed with the idea of entrusting the dossier to other investigators, given the continuing state of war within the Neufchâteau branch. Unfortunately, this is too sensitive for the public prosecutor,' he said then. Vandermeersch intends to go to the extreme and consider all elements provided by X1 or someone else. A few days after Vandermeersch's appointment, Dernicourt walked into Aimé Bille's office, asking him to remind him who was Michel P. Vandermeersch asked him to

do some research on this character. Bille is amazed that the current leader of the investigation does not even know this.

Michel P's persona is fascinating in many ways. It shows that it was not at all the case that the De Baets team was only interested in X1. They followed a dozen leads, and Michel P was one of them.*17 P himself was never a suspect in the murder. On 13 February 1984, he was in Morocco - which can count as an alibi. He was one of Christine Van Hees's friends a few months before her death. He claims the stories about her contacts with the punk scene were wholly fabricated. She did look for alternative youth cultures, but according to P, it concerned a group of young people who were rather snobby and for whom the scooter was a status symbol. Others say this milieu was headed by two rather violent figures who earned their living as stand builders at the Heysel and lived in a rather expensive apartment in the centre of Brussels. The intriguing thing about P is that his testimony closely matches the story of Fabienne K. What the Dernicourt searches have yielded is unknown. What is certain is that a few months later, the Van Hees case was again hopelessly stuck in the good old punk trail. Vandermeersch is certainly letting himself be fooled by the rereaders.

On 29 April 1998, the Flemish newspapers De Standaard and Het Nieuwsblad listed the twelve main points that led the public prosecutor to conclude that X1 was not present at the murder of Christine Van Hees. Journalist Isa Van Dorselaer wrote the article. She reports on an interview with substitute Paule Somers. The article's headline reads 'Why Brussels does not believe X1'. Below that: Christine Van Hees' parents 'substantially ridiculed' Regina Louf. The article itself could be considered a re-reading:

- Brussels investigating judge Damien Vandermeersch closed the investigation into X1's testimony on the murder of Christine Van Hees last week. The results were 'totally negative' (...).
- Louf gave a detailed description of the building where Christine was murdered. According to substitute Somers, on the authority of examining magistrate Damien

Vandermeersch, the dwelling described by X1 is certainly not the building in which Christine was found.

- X1 describes how she was forced to insert a knife into Christine's vagina and how Christine's body was worked on with a metal object. According to Somers, the law doctors found no marks on the badly burned body. An internal autopsy revealed no 'similar traumatic injuries to the genitals'.
- According to X1, the bloodflow from that internal wound was stemmed with a tampon found at the murder scene. Detectives did find a tampon but in another building of the mushroom farm. It was only very slightly bloodied, not 'drenched'.
- The blood type matches Christine's, but hers belongs to the most common blood type. Vandermeersch is still waiting for the DNA test results.
- The press partially revealed details about how Christine was tied up and with what materials.
- One sensational element was the nail that X1 said had been punched through Christine's wrists. According to the prosecution, there was no such 'crucifixion'. The old dossier states, 'a nail was planted in the left wrist'. According to the public prosecutor, 'planted' has many meanings. Vandermeersch had the photos of the body enlarged and, together with the experts, established that the nail had been fused laterally against the wrist in the fire. According to the public prosecutor, the nail came from one of the wooden pallets with which the perpetrator(s) covered the body to set it on fire. Or was it wrapped in the electrical wire used to tie up Christine. That it was not through the wrist explains why the autopsy report is silent about it: there was no wound.
- According to X1, Christine Van Hees led a double life for several months as a schoolgirl and as a victim of the network she got into via Michel Nihoul. We have found no evidence of a double life. Christine had two circles of friends - the school, with her traditional girlfriends, and the rougher punk environment where she hung out,' says Somers. According to Somers, the statements of the girlfriends in the old dossier refer to that punk milieu.
- Christine's parents stated in February, after being given full access to their daughter's file through their lawyer, that X1 could not have known Christine at all. According to the

public prosecutor, during the parents' confrontation with X1, X1 `was thoroughly ridiculed several times by Van Hees' mother. For instance, the mother of Van Hees mentioned their daughter's trip to Canada a few weeks before her murder. `X1 immediately remembered what Christine had said about that trip. But the mother of Van Hees caught X1 in a trap. After all, Christine had never been to Canada,' Somers said.

- According to some media sources that published parts of the dossier, the old murder file is teeming with references to Marc Dutroux and Michel Nihoul. No, says Somers. `There is talk of a certain Marc from Mons, while Dutroux is from Charleroi.' According to Neufchâteau, Dutroux mainly went skating on the track in Forest, Christine on the one in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe, and only once in Forest. `Yes, maybe they ice-skated on the same ice ring without knowing it.
- The Brussels public prosecutor attributes that exact coincidence to a meeting between Nihoul and Van Hees. Christine sometimes attended parties at Radio Activité, the commercial radio station in Etterbeek. Nihoul was involved in that radio station. Maybe they bumped into each other, maybe not.' Nihoul has yet to be questioned about this. Moreover, the Brussels public prosecutor emphasises that Dutroux and Nihoul did not know each other then; `the investigators in Neufchâteau have long established that'.
- Furthermore, according to the attendance register, X1 attended school in Ghent at least until four o'clock that day. X1 says she was playing truant then. She situated the facts when she was eleven; Regina was fifteen at the time. X1 admits to having difficulty situating events in time.
- As for the tampon, investigating judge Vandermeersch is also waiting for the results of a DNA test on a cigarette butt found at the murder scene. But despite these elements, he formally closed the investigation into X1's testimony. According to him, the results were `totally negative'. `That X1 went through something very traumatic is certain,' says Somers. `But she was not present at the murder of Christine Van Hees. The investigating judge is not going to change his mind about that.'*18

The anecdote about Canada, in particular, is food for thought for those who still want to give Regina Louf the benefit of the

doubt at the end of April 1998. The story was not only highlighted in Het Nieuwsblad and De Standaard but also on television. Regina Louf was unmasked during the confrontation with Pierre Van Hees and Antoinette Vanhoucke. The newspaper La Dernière Heure spends a whole page on it and remarks that it is laughable how the justice system was so intensely involved in this affair for a year and a half while the mother of Van Hees needed only one trick question to discredit X1. She made up a story during the confrontation about how her daughter took a trip to Canada shortly before her death. Regina Louf responded that she remembered how 'Kristien' had discussed that. It couldn't be more painful.

At the beginning of 1999, the Brussels lawyer Patricia Vandersmissen was given access to part of the Van Hees file on behalf of Regina Louf. I tend to believe Regina, but the Canada story was the point of my commitment,' she says. 'I wanted to help defend her from the constant attacks in the press. I resolved to do so discreetly and adhere rigorously to my duty of silence. I will continue to do so.'

The lawyer refused any cooperation with this book. She did, however, inform the authors of the contents of one specific section of dossier. It was the first thing she looked for when browsing through the whole load of paper: the text of the confrontation, as it took place on 3 March 1998. Everything was recorded on video and then put on paper. Thus, there cannot be the slightest dispute about what was said. It appears the confrontation took place under the supervision of BOB officers Danny De Pauw and Baudouin Dernicourt. It is mainly the mother of Van Hees and Regina Louf, who speak Dutch. The father of Van Hees remained relatively quiet. The text counts 61 pages. It appears that Mother Van Hees has been firing questions at Regina Louf since the beginning of the confrontation. She usually reacts dismissively. She is unsure about the colour of Kristien's bicycle. She also remembers that she spoke French to her friends. The dialogue then turns to the period between September 1983 and February 1984. And then it comes:

Antoinette Vanhoucke: 'And meanwhile, she's going on a long trip. She is going to Canada. Did she never talk about that?

Regina Louf: 'I don't think we ever had the chance to discuss such things.'¹⁹

'That's what it says,' says Patricia Vandersmissen. 'Nothing else. I read the official report from front to back and back to front. I started again three times, searching again and again whether the mother had come back to it. But no. This is all that was said about the trip to Canada: nothing. Regina Louf says she knows nothing about a trip to Canada. The truth is the opposite of what the press reported to the public. If this is true, it becomes frightening. What is the use of modern guidelines and handing out cell phones to public prosecutors to better inform the press when it turns out that they are lying?

The building described by X1 is not the building where Christine Van Hees' body was found, says the substitute as if anyone had ever claimed otherwise. This was precisely the improbable part of X1's testimony. She already made a clear distinction during the interrogation of 18 November 1996 between 'the house', where the torture of 'Kristien' began, and the basement, where it ended. It is this house of which her description was tested, based on twelve points, against the memories of the son of the former manager of the mushroom farm. He decided that the person who had described it 'must have been there'. Somers will later acknowledge that the description was correct but adds in the same breath that the house was inaccessible at the time of the facts and that nothing was found there that seemed to be connected with the murder.²⁰ Nothing? According to the old dossier, not only the blood-soaked Tampax was found there, but also a pile of burned notebooks from the book bag of Christine Van Hees.²¹ It is also where the first fire was discovered on the evening of 13 February 1984. A simple question immediately arises: How did the arsonist manage to get into the house if it was "inaccessible"?

Somers draws her conclusions from the official reports drawn up by the Dernicourt team in late 1997. Those reports emphasised that the house had two floors. X1 described the ground floor. Tampax and notebooks were on the second

floor, which in 1984 could only be reached through an open window with a chair under it. The basement where the remains of Christine Van Hees were discovered was about ten meters away. The Brussels detectives suggest that during the interrogation on 18 November 1996, X1 said that she arrived in the cellar directly from the house by stairs. And that is not possible. But did X1 say that? Back to 18 November:

- Did you come down those stairs?
- No.
- Isn't there a door or something where you see a staircase?
- When we first arrived, one of us opened the door to look. I could see part of the stairs.
- What do they look like?
- Hm?
- What do the stairs that you see look like?
- An old staircase.
- An old staircase that goes down to the basement or something?
- No, I think it goes up. The one that goes to the top floor, right?*22

For once, X1's descriptions were specific. There is a staircase; it goes to the upper floor and not to the basement. Her description of the route between the house and the cellar is so precise that it sends the son of the former manager into a tizzy, even months after X1 had been declared insane by the whole of Belgium. 'She can't possibly know this unless she has been there; I stand by that.' he says*23. Based on X1's statements, the son can also draw in the most detailed way how she got in there. Not through the street side - the front door was indeed closed - but through a door that gave out onto an inner courtyard. That was where lorries came to pick up the mushrooms in the distant past, which X1 also described correctly. Was the door there in early 1984 open, or was it closed? None of the documents drawn up during the first findings offer a decisive answer. Once again, Dernicourt and Somers are just making things up.

Next argument. The autopsy report states that there were 'no traumatic wounds to the genitals'. However, in the report - or rather in each of the three versions - it is pointed out several

times that each of the findings should be considered with reservation because the body of Christine Van Hees was largely burned. The authors did not decide to reconstruct the course of the interrogations of X1 in this book for fun. The reader can determine for himself how they went. It is an endless recalling of horrific scenes, the fighting of traumas and endless silences. Somers and her rereaders build theories around a few words spoken between crying fits. The confusion in X1's head is perhaps a weak argument to be used against material verification. Still, if X1 was a witness to the murder, a coherent, well-organised and one hundred per cent correct account would be an even more legitimate ground for scepticism. We got a snapshot from X1', says De Baets about this later. 'People don't want to understand that. I also thought that we should test her testimony to the maximum against the data of the past. You can't start making lists like an accountant does, of injuries that have or haven't been confirmed. It's much more complex than that. We felt that the first thing we had to do was to verify whether her story could be possible. That's what we tried to do. Well, it turned out that it could. So, you have to investigate. I now find that it has not been investigated.'

The most discussed item in X1's testimony is, without doubt, the nail. X1, during her interrogation on 18 November, talks about "a metal object" struck into the victim's hand. What does the old dossier reveal two weeks later? The same. The first police officer to arrive at the scene of the murder on 13 February 1984 was the Auderghem police commissioner Jacques Dekock. He drew up the very first official report about the findings. He recorded that the body showed severe wounds to the head and neck - which, by the way, also corresponds to what X1 declared - and then wrote down that striking sentence: 'A nail is struck in the left wrist.' Vandermeersch, it says, had the 1984 photographs of the body enlarged. According to him, this was an 8-centimetre nail from one of the wooden pallets lying around the old mushroom farm. Since those crates were used to burn the body, the presence of an upright nail at the level of what was the left-hand rests on a coincidence, it is now said. Paule Somers does not tell us that the photos were submitted to Commissioner Jacques Dekock in early March 1998. During his interrogation, Dekock later

recounted, Brussels BOB officers tried to convince him that he had not looked closely that night in 1984. He gets the photos pushed under his nose. He looked but saw nothing that would make him deviate from what he had reported fourteen years earlier. 'What I said is clearly visible on the photographs,' says Dekock. 'My observations of the time were confirmed. That image has always stayed with me. When I drew the doctors' attention to that nail that night of the murder, they also brushed off my remarks. They were again trying to make me declare something other than what I saw with my own eyes. I don't understand that at all.*24

Nail or no nail? We have no idea. It would be more interesting to test X1's statements against old family photographs taken by the son of the former mushroom farm operator. The thin hollow tubes described by X1 can be seen very clearly in those pictures. Incidentally, Somers is again escaping the truth when she claims that X1 would have said something about a 'crucifixion'. This kind of nonsense was mentioned in some of the punks' earlier statements.

Paule Somers' demolition of her arguments is complete when she claims Marc Dutroux never went skating in the Poseidon. It is not plausible that the magistrate would not know that during the first search by the public prosecutor of Neufchâteau at Dutroux's home, a timetable was found for this skating rink in Woluwe.*25 It is not plausible that she would not know that both Michèle Martin and Dutroux's then companion Francis H. have stated in the most affirmative way that Dutroux went skating in the Poseidon during that period.*26 All these statements are in the form of official reports in the file she is supposed to lead. In Het Nieuwsblad, Paule Somers posits that 'the statements of the girlfriends in the old dossier refer to that punk milieu'. She clearly refers to the statement of Fabienne K. But what did K. say again about the environment Christine Van Hees ended up in? 'It was not about punks and not about skinheads either. I am sure of that.*27

Somers can also report that details of how Christine Van Hees was tied up, were published in the press. Here, we get a clash of two arguments. In the first report of the review, it was said

that the story of X1 about this did not correspond with the facts. Now, Paule Somers appears on the scene to report that the details mentioned by X1 had already appeared in the press. In between, there is also the by-now outdated argument that this was suggested to X1 by her interrogators. Perhaps they 'briefed' X1 based on old newspaper clippings. One question remains unanswered: which newspaper clippings? As it turns out, in 1984, a small media war raged around this file.

'Christine was indeed tied up at the ankles and wrists with old electric cords, but all other repulsive details that have been mentioned about this murder have only sprung from sick minds', Alain Guillaume writes in *Le Soir* one month after the murder.*28 His article is apparently a reaction to what his colleague René Haquin had reported three weeks earlier, also in *Le Soir*. He talked about 'barbed wire' with which Christine Van Hees would have been tied up and mentioned 'a ritual murder'.*29 In none of the articles could the authors find any mention of a rope. Only an electric cord, iron wire or barbed wire are mentioned. X1 only started talking about electric cables in February 1997. Until then, she has only spoken about rope. For recollection: among the pieces found at the murder scene was a cord of 1,80 meters.

Some logic also fits in with the hypothesis of a testimony fuelled by old newspaper clippings. All the articles of the time mention the age of Christine Van Hees and set out the chronology of the last day of her life. If the interrogators had used that to 'feed' their witness, it is somewhat surprising that they would have overlooked such basics.

The situation becomes slightly bewildering when it appears that Paule Somers proclaims in the media that the X1-track is definitively closed - 'and the investigating judge is not going to come back on this' - but that Michel Nihoul still has to be interrogated. It does not take much imagination to understand the

atmosphere in which that interrogation must have occurred. Here again, the judiciary is not really doing this man a favour. If he has nothing to do with the murder - which we can only

hope - he risks being haunted by suspicions for the rest of his life. It is pretty unique for an interrogation of a suspect to occur after the leading magistrates have stated in the press that they are confident he is innocent. To illustrate how the Brussels investigation proceeded in 1998, let's read along with the interrogation of Marc Dutroux. This occurred on 11 June 1998, one and a half months after the Brussels public prosecutor announced the investigation was closed.

- 'According to Regina Louf's testimony, you are allegedly involved in the murder of Christine Van Hees. What do you think about that?'
- 'Either she is mentally ill, or she was manipulated.'

Dutroux is also questioned about his visits to the Poseidon. And lo and behold: where earlier in the investigation it was conclusively shown that he often went there in 1983-'84, he now tells us that he found it 'too cold' at that skating rink. 'I only went to the Poseidon once or twice, and that was before 1980.' About the sums deposited in his accounts in the days after the murder, Dutroux says. 'I don't remember that.' It is clearly an answer that greatly satisfies the investigators. Their next question is also the last to Dutroux: 'Do you have anything to add?' Answer: 'For me, it is clear. This case is based on manipulation.*30

Somers can also report that Dutroux and Nihoul did not know each other in 1984 and says that 'the investigators in Neufchâteau have already examined this for a long time'. With this statement, Somers summarises the conclusions of an official report' that was added to the file on 9 January 1998 by members of the proofreading team. In this report, neatly drawn tables show when Bouty, Dutroux, Nihoul and lawyer E. got to know each other. What does it show? Here, 'findings' are nothing but statements by Bouty, Dutroux, Nihoul and E. themselves.*31 If you dare to start from the hypothesis that these people were involved in criminal acts in the early 1980s. You know that in 1996, the whole of Belgium was talking about nothing but the Dutroux case; it is the most normal thing in the world that all those involved will want to keep their share to a strict minimum. Even the most innocent politician who has ever shaken hands with Michel Nihoul at the end of 1996 is

squirming to deny this. In addition, the PV ignores the knowledge that Marc Dutroux was in prison from 1985 to 1992. During that period, he could have had little or no contact with Bouty, Nihoul and co. Anyone who wants to know the truth must search Dutroux and Nihoul's past before 1985. Nothing shows that this happened after the team De Baets was dismissed.

Following the completion of the X1-investigation, the search in the Brussels' punk scene of the past resumed. A broadcast in "Oproep 2020" ensues to track down a punk dressed as a Nazi. This yielded nothing. Halfway through 1999, rumours abound in judicial circles in Brussels that Damien Vandermeersch's 6/98 file would soon be returned to the public prosecutor's office under the heading of "no further action".

NOTES:

1. Where possible, the surnames mentioned in the re-reading report were replaced by letters. Y refers to the Flemish businessman, and X to the family that owned the castle in s'Gravenwezel.
2. Interview with Regina Louf, 11 March 1999.
3. Notes on interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, 1 March 1997, PV 150.364. The authors did not have access to the verbatim report of this interrogation. However, there is nothing to show that the first report differs from what the video camera recorded.
4. De Baets does so in his note no. 323, in which he informs prosecutor Bourlet of the 'confessions' of X1 regarding the murder of Katrien De Cuyper.
5. Search at the home of X1, BOB Brussels, 20 March 1997, PV 150.821.
6. 'Tortures show a resemblance', Het Laatste Nieuws, 14 March 1997.
7. In addition to the father, mother, and two brothers, 24 other people from Christine Van Hees's entourage were questioned. The investigators specify that one of them

- remembers a teddy bear 'without being categorical'.
Brussels BOB, 29 December 1997.
8. Notes on interrogation X1, BOB Brussels, 8 February 1997, PV 150.071.
 9. These findings are the subject of subsequent court documents: Police of Meise (22 August 1996, pv 199), Judiciary Police Brussels (3 September 1996, PV 39.027), BOB Brussels (4 April 1997, PV 150.759), prosecutor's office of Brussels (note number BR.37.52.212/96). For the avoidance of doubt, the current managers of The Paddock Riding School, which used to be called something else, have nothing to do with this.
 10. The date is incorrect as far as could be ascertained, and Nihoul would only have had a horse in this riding school at the end of the 1980s. Whether this is resounding proof that he was unfamiliar with this riding school in the years before is doubtful.
 11. Findings BOB Brussels, 29 December 1997, PV 152.711.
 12. Findings BOB Brussels, 28 January 1998, PV 150.188.
 13. Recognition at the scene by X1, Brussels BOB, 27 February 1997, PV 150.322.
 14. Observation S., BOB Brussels, 8 March 1997, PV 150.714.
 15. Telephone contact with Frank D.G., BOB Brussels, 6 February, 1997.
 16. Analysis of diary X1, BOB Brussel, 4 September 1997, PV 152.367.
 17. The De Baets team's detectives encountered P shortly before their removal in May 1997 via Ingrid K., a former friend of Christine Van Hees. Michel P was subsequently interrogated twice. BOB Brussels, May 11 and 26, 1997, PV's 151.465 and 151.665.
 18. Het Nieuwsblad 23 April 1998.
 19. Patricia Vandersmissen refers to the transcript of the confrontation as drawn up by the Brussels BOB, 3 March 1998, PV 151.206.
 20. Controversy, Sunday, 14 June 1998, RTL-TVi.
 21. Police Auderghem, 13 February 1984, PV 30.14.321.
 22. Interrogation X1, 18 November 1996, BOB Brussel, PV 116.991.

23. Interview with the son of the manager of the old mushroom farm, 28 April 1999.
24. Telephone contact with Jacques Dekock, 9 March 1998. Shortly afterwards, Dekock was forbidden by his superiors to talk to the press.
25. BOB Charleroi, August 13, 1996, PV 103.313.
26. Interrogation Michèle Martin, Judiciary Police Arlon, December 4, 1996, PV 118.723. BOB Brussels.
Interrogation Francis H., BOB Brussels, April 12, 1997, PV 151.184.
27. Brussels Judiciary Police, 20 February 1984, PV 7112.
28. Le Soir, 12 March 1984.
29. Le Soir, 21 February 1984.
30. Interrogation of Marc Dutroux, BOB Brussels, 11 June 1998, PV 151.231.
31. Report of the BOB Brussels, 9 January, 1998, PV 150.042, annex 2 bis

5. 'I know with certainty that when I had coitus with her for the first time, Regina was certainly no longer a virgin.'

Tony V., April 23 1998

` Minister of Justice Stefaan De Clerck formally denies the accusations of a cover-up. "All the elements show that the dossiers have not been dormant; they are active and will remain so. It is wrong to disseminate this argument." Attorney General Christine Dekkers, who chairs the College of Procurators General, also concluded after reading a status update from her colleagues that the dossiers have never been at a standstill.`*1

The first month of 1998 is X1 month. On Wednesday January 7, De Morgen and Télé Moustique began publishing parts of the dossiers. Both periodicals justified their initiative by pointing out that the investigations were deadlocked. That is not the case, the Minister and Prosecutors General now say. The question arises: what is the definition of stagnation? Has the fisherman quit his attempts to catch a fish when he fishes for an entire afternoon with a rod without a hook?

Let's see how the X1 investigation went in Ghent. At the beginning of 1998, this public prosecutor's office vehemently claimed that the inquiry had always continued. Judging by the many police reports drawn up there, it seems difficult to argue otherwise. There are more than a hundred of them. Members of the Ghent BOB have already interrogated X1 on May 31 1997.*2 But this session did not add much useful information. Captain Wouter Moons and First Sergeant Julien Wynsberghe set the tone by bombarding her from the get-go with pictures. X1 pointed at two images, then said that this didn't necessarily mean anything and that she didn't feel like cooperating. Only sporadically did she answer a question. X1 revealed little more

about' Clo than what she had stated in previous interrogations but she did, for example, mention what jewellery Clo was wearing.

- She had an ankle bracelet...
- (...) A leather strap or what?
- No, a chain...,*3

Carine Dellaert was indeed wearing an ankle chain link at the time of her death. However, these small correlations make little impression on the Ghent BOB officers. There's a lot more happening behind-the-scenes than before. One month after this interrogation, the Ghent prosecutor, Jean Soenen, received a copy of the first rereading report from Brussels. He immediately ceased cooperating with the antenna-Neufchâteau and ordered the Dellaert case to be pursued exclusively in Ghent; the local BOB took over the case.

Remarkably, no investigating judge was appointed to the Dellaert case at the beginning of 1997. In Brussels, X1's statements about 'Kristien' were sufficient to start an active investigation. Not so in Ghent. At no time does Soenen relinquish control, and he can direct the inquiry as per his intimate conviction, as he has already expressed during meetings with detectives: 'Such things do not exist, certainly not in my district. After the change of team of detectives, it takes a mere three weeks for them to produce a report in which 'his' BOB drags X1 through the mud. The conclusion sounds solemn and hard: 'We can formally state that all the allegations of X1 were thoroughly investigated. We can formally state that all her declarations about Clo was incorrect and even impossible.'*4 We verified how the investigators came to this conclusion.

On June 3, Ghent BOB officers started interrogating 28 former classmates of Carine Dellaert, mainly from 1981-'82. The BOB of Ghent treats the case as a traffic accident. They asked each of the 28 people if they could remember whether Carine Dellaert was ever called 'Flo' or 'Clo'. As if the contrary would come as a surprise - according to X1, this was her call sign within the secret world of the network - the answer 28 times was no. The second question is even more poignant in its simplicity: did Carine Dellaert ever recruit girls

to participate in sex parties? Nobody had ever heard of Carine recruiting girls to participate in parties,' the BOB can report.

The investigators also carried out some 'material verifications.' X1 said that she regularly played truant with 'Clo' and that one sometimes secretly joined the class of the other. According to the class schedules of Dellaert's school, this was impossible, as shown in a report on August 6, 1997. However, how relative fifteen-year-old data from a school can be is shown in that same report. According to the school archives, Carine Dellaert was absent for three and a half days in the 1981-'82 schoolyear. However, according to the friends interviewed, that figure is incorrect since she 'skipped school occasionally'. X1 was manifestly wrong when she stated during that Ghent interrogation that Clo had a younger sister: 'Such a little fragile thing.' Carine Dellaert had a two-year-old sister, the BOB notes: 'She was not a tiny fragile thing, but a sturdily built young woman.

About the family of 'Clo', X1 stated that her mother had moved out one day. Wrong, the investigators indicate the father left the parental house. X1 talked overwhelmingly about a breakup between father and mother, which is correct. When X1 mentions the ankle chain of 'Clo,' she is also accurate, but rather than accept this, the BOB officers make a case of the ring X1 mentioned: a ring in the shape of a snake. Their report states: 'The investigation into the murder of Carine Dellaert revealed that she was wearing an ankle chain at the time of her disappearance. At no time was such a ring mentioned.' Is that so? Let us have a look at the report on what was fished out of the eel pit on September 25 1984, along with the remains of Carine Dellaert: '(...) two Gillette knives - six buttons - a hair clip - a coffee spoon - blue-red pearl ring (...)'.*5

Curious. X1 indeed describes a different kind of ring, but on the other hand, she has always maintained that Clo lived for several months after her disappearance. So, there was plenty of time to obtain another ring. X1 also managed to describe the mistress of Clo's father. As X1 told us, this woman did have two young daughters, which the BOB must admit in their report. It is also true that she was about thirty at the time. Yet the Ghent BOB officers are not satisfied with the explanation. For instance, a tattoo that X1 claimed she had; she did not, as it turned out from the interrogation of a later lover. Behold all

the "elements" based on which the Ghent BOB decided on August 6, 1997, that 'Clo' could not have been Carine Dellaert.

Halfway into October, the Ghent BOB can confirm, based on new data, that 'the investigation in connection with Clo has turned out to be negative'. The latest report generously quotes the interrogations of Carine Dellaert's mother and her brother. They state that she always came home punctually after school, never went to bars and had never been pregnant. They also remark that the description X1 gave of their former home is not wholly accurate. It's all fascinating, but is it about objective data? The mother of Carine Dellaert had already indicated to journalists at the beginning of 1997 that she did not want to hear another word about the case and that she had given up all hope that the justice system would ever find the perpetrators. The sister of Carine Dellaert categorically refuses to cooperate with the investigation.*6 The BOB officers do not consider it helpful to mention that Gwendolina Dellaert herself has a history of familial sexual abuse.*7

On September 18, 1997, the BOB officers went to Waarschoot, the house that X1 described and, where she claimed that Clo delivered a baby. De Baets' colleagues Hoskens and Liesenborgs had already gone there a year earlier and found that X1's description, except for one detail, completely matched the visible reality. Only the small wall that X1 described was nowhere to be seen.

In his official report, First Sergeant Jan Vincent of the Ghent BOB now goes into great detail regarding a wall that is not there. He has to agree that it concerns a bungalow surrounded by a garden. X1 also spoke of a 'landscaped pond, not a natural one, but a rectangular one.' That pond, she noted, circumnavigated the bungalow like a rampart. About the house, she said, 'Yes, a square construction (made from) a kind of brick. With a little fountain.'*8. Vincent must admit that the pond is indeed there, but then - we quote literally: 'This rampart has a natural rather than a constructed look. The pond is certainly not rectangular, and nowhere are any bricks or a fountain to be seen.'*9

It is rather strange. One detective says white, the other black. So what do we do? We go and see for ourselves, of course.

What did we discover? The house in Waarschoot is primarily surrounded by a pond that is as rectangular as a constructed pond can be. Because of the growth of trees and shrubs, there are now indeed bumps in the straight line that was intended at the time of construction, but if you take into account that X1 says she was here in 1983, there is little else to conclude than that the pond must have formed a perfect rectangle then. The house, any passerby can tell, is indeed built of brick. And what is in the middle of the garden, right in front of the front door? A fountain, at least one meter high! Although it is not a real fountain - it spouts no water - it is a white garden sculpture that, even from a hundred meters away, is impossible to mistake for anything other than a fountain.*10

'We have verified X1's statements down to the smallest and absurd details, and they have all turned out to be incorrect', declares the Ghent substitute Nicole De Rouck to journalists on April 28 1998.*11 She then bases herself on the diligent detective work of BOB officer Jan Vincent. He will also draw up a report on September 1, 1997, about the first interrogations of X1's childhood friends.*12 This official report will later be forwarded to the readers, who will eagerly conclude that almost all names of victims mentioned by X1 can be found in her immediate surroundings.

After Jan Vincent's shenanigans, there seem to be reasons to question everything that comes from Ghent. Even if the BOB officer had candidly admitted that the house description was correct, this still did not prove anything about the proposition that Carine Dellaert was killed there. It only meant that X1 gave an accurate description—no more, no less. And we must remember that according to people living in Waarschoot, the house had been a secret brothel for a while.

In the margin of her interrogation on May 31 1997, X1 pointed out a flower store near St. Peter's railway station in Ghent, about which she said that there used to be a bar where she and 'Clo' were regularly abused. In June, the Ghent police came out to interrogate the former proprietors of the bar, called La Paix, and to ask them directly 'if child prostitution used to take place there'. No, the former owners say. This time, Sergeant Danny Vanheeuverswyn draws up the report.

X1's description turns out to be essentially correct - the location of the stairs, the bar, the number of floors, the toilet, and the bedside tables - and the BOB goes to great lengths to depict it differently. His technique is more refined than Vincent's. If he counts a mezzanine, consisting of a small space between the ground and the second floor, he arrives at four floors instead of 'two or three' as X1 stated. The BOB officer makes other discoveries. The motif on the wallpaper described by X1 does not correspond to what a former owner remembers. In the same official report, Vanheuerswyn wins the prize for the most impressive contradiction. First, he has the former manager, Gisèle V, declare at length that only 'the more distinguished public' came to the pub. At the end of his paper, he mentions one more detail about Gisèle V: 'The person involved is known to our services for prostitution.'*13

If the Ghent BOB urgently needs a course to identify a fountain correctly, perhaps they also need an abacus. The detectives report about the bar La Paix: 'From our investigation, it appeared that this establishment was closed for five years, this in the period that X1 would have known Clo.'*14 The bar was indeed closed between August 15 1978 and September 10 1982. But that makes four years and not five, as the smallest child can calculate. Minor error? No, it's a significant mistake. Carine Dellaert disappeared on August 30, 1982, twelve days before Bar La Paix reopened. The autopsy report allows us to assume that the girl lived for some time after her disappearance. So it's perfectly possible. The investigators mention the correct dates in their reports but continue to deduce that X1 could never have seen Carine Dellaert there. A small piece of information: the manager of La Paix in the period after September 1982 was... Gisèle V. For a woman who, according to her own words, only ran a modest cafe in the 1980s, she is doing well today. She moved into a house in upscale Sint-Martens-Latem and is in business with a renowned Ghent building contractor. Based on these 'findings', the Ghent public prosecutor decided in September 1997 no longer to concern himself with the question of who killed Carine Dellaert but 'to take a closer look at person X1'. So it says in a report of the Ghent BOB:

'No indication was found to suggest, as Louf Regina does, that Carine Dellaert would have lived in concealment for another year after her disappearance, nor that she would have been pregnant - let alone in late-stage pregnancy. Professor Timperman's autopsy report also did not state that Carine Dellaert would have been pregnant.'

Prosecutor Soenen says it with great conviction when he announces the final closure of the Dellaert dossier at a press conference on June 12, 1998. Strange, again. The report of Timperman mentions laminitis in the pelvis, swelling of the breasts and fluid loss. Before her disappearance, no one noticed anything about a pregnancy - indicating that she must have lived for several months after her disappearance.

It is feasible of course that new methods have been developed since 1985 that allow for more expert analysis and interpretation of the data from the Timperman report, which Soenen also proposes during his press conference. The authors managed to get hold of the entire list of investigative acts which the public prosecutor's office in Ghent had the BOB of Ghent carried out between February 5, 1997, and June 2, 1998; the closure of the case. It concerns 113 official reports. Nowhere is a new investigation mentioned.*15 However, recent scientific literature on, for example, the use of the laminaria pen is easy to find. There is no evidence that this drug has ever been used for anything other than inducing childbirth or an abortion.

Could anything be added to the work Timperman had done in 1985? Indeed, there was. The critical question in the X1 investigation was: how old was Carine Dellaert when she died? We can now quickly find out, said First Sergeant Stephan Liesenborgs when he learned at the beginning of 1997 during a business meeting at the Ghent public prosecutor's office that the skull of Carine Dellaert had never been buried. Nobody knew why, but it had been kept in a cardboard box in the judicial laboratory all those years.

Liesenborgs was in charge of the Dellaert file at the Neufchâteau branch and contacted the Metropolitan Police in London. He had read somewhere that someone had recently developed a scientific method to determine teenagers' death dates based on dental remains accurately. In London,

Liesenborgs' question was answered with British stoicism: 'The specialist in this field is a countryman of yours, my dear fellow. His name is Eddy De Valck, and he lives in a place called Grimbergen. He can help you.'

`There were indeed two people from the Brussels BOB here at the time,' recalls dentist Eddy De Valck. `They acted a bit mysterious at first, but finally told that story about the girl. I first asked them how old she was when she disappeared. Sixteen years. And five months, they said. My next question was: when was her body found? Their answer: three years later. Then I said: no problem.' Dr. De Valck's technique relies on tables on the growth of human teeth up to the age of 19. The tables describe the average evolution for each tooth between the crown's initial formation and the root's closure. Twelve growth stages are defined for each tooth and distinguish between boys and girls. Standard deviations based on hundreds of measurements worldwide allow a reasonably precise age determination. A radiograph is sufficient.

`The case of Carine Dellaert seemed very simple to me,' says Dr De Valck. The ultimate age at which the root of the second molar closes in girls is sixteen years and six months. If the root cavity of her second molar was fully developed, that would mean that the chance that she had died shortly after her disappearance is very small. If the cavity was still open, one could conclude with a reasonably high degree of certainty that she died shortly or not so long after her disappearance. We tested these findings against the third molar, whose growth usually does not end until the nineteenth year of life. Since the corpse was found about nineteen years after birth, this case fell perfectly within the age range for which the tables can help us. Of course, this technique does not allow us to say on what exact day and month she died, but I was able to answer the principal question in their investigation.'*16

In the report of the national coordination meeting of magistrates on May 22, 1997, we read how prosecutor Soenen briefly intervened: 'Age determination (prof. Piette) impossible.'*17 If we understand correctly, the public prosecutor obtained a second opinion from Professor Michel

Piette of the Department of Judicial Medicine at Ghent University. And according to Piette, De Valck is peddling nonsense. 'I did not put it that sharply,' says the professor. I have indeed drawn up a document for the prosecutor. I reported a margin of error in Mr. De Valck's method that can make a difference of a few months to a year. By the way, those teeth had been examined before.' Which one is it? Was it impossible because the method was faulty, or was it unnecessary because the procedure had already been done? Piette does not want to say more about it. The public prosecutor decides what the experts do or don't do.' Inquiries made to investigators at the time reveal that in the old dossier, there is no mention of any investigation into Carine Dellaert's teeth. I am very formal about this,' says one of them. That is, as it turns out, the main reason why Neufchâteau was so interested in the teeth.

Observation: Piette is a professor of general judicial medicine, and De Valck is a specialist stomatologist. Both doctors relate to each other like a general practitioner and a specialist. Dr De Valck bursts out laughing when he hears that people in Ghent have doubts about the reliability of his method. 'On March 10 and 11, 1999, I had to give two days of training courses to prosecutors from all over Belgium. That was by order of the Ministry of Justice. I also constantly have to conduct analyses for the Disaster Victim Identification Team of the gendarmerie, most recently in the Pandy case. I've been working for all the public prosecutors' offices in Belgium for years, including Ghent. I know they prefer to work with Professor Piette, but they usually call on me regarding dental work. For example, whenever they pick up a young gipsy who has gotten into some mischief and claims to be under eighteen, they bring him to me. Then I take a radiograph, while the police officers sit in the waiting room. Within the hour, they have the results. Based on this, they decide whether the gipsy will be arrested or not. It would have been easier with Carine Dellaert because a skull like that doesn't move about during my investigation.'

At a meeting at the Ghent Public Prosecutor's Office in early 1997, comments were made about the high rates that Dr. De Valck would charge. A simple question. How much does such an examination cost? 'More than ten thousand francs,' says

Dr. De Valck. 'We could have gotten a yes or no on X1 then, at the very beginning,' says one detective. When I then hear afterwards prosecutor Soenen declare that his services 'lost a year of precious time' with X1, I can conclude nothing but that he wanted to prevent the clarification of this murder.' Dr. De Valck understands just as little. I always try to remain friendly, but when I heard Mrs. De Rouck on television declaring that they had investigated everything, I had to restrain myself from grabbing the telephone.

In Brussels, a different approach is used. On November 13 1997, three members of the rereading team sent Van Espen a 17-page report. The bicycle, the teddy bear, the Tears for Fears song, the sweater with the number eight and the photos of Albert D are supposed to show that the X1-dossier is based on nothing.*18 Radio Activité, the car with the eagle, The Dolo, Pascal Lamarque, Philippe Moussadyk, the Poseidon, the bizarre financial movements on Dutroux's account and so forth are not mentioned in the report. None of these elements are deemed worthy of further investigation.

In those days, the Brussels prosecutor's office is all about fiction. The Verwilghen Commission has called prosecutor Benoît Dejemeppe incompetent, and many believe that he should resign. Virtually the entire public prosecutor's office reacts with shock, rallies behind the prosecutor, and senses shadowy conspiracies everywhere. At the end of August, investigating judge Jean-Claude Leys reported what 'an anonymous source' had told him in a solemn report: My interlocutor says that my colleague Jean-Claude Van Espen is currently the subject of defamatory allegations (incest...!), coming from the gendarmes of the Neufchâteau branch.*19 The atmosphere of -he said that- opens the door to the most crazy stories. One conspiracy theory replaces another. De Baets is said to be the biological father of Regina Louf. The first phone call by her friend, Tania V, to Connerotte is said to have been a set-up. De Baets is said to be a pimp himself in his spare time. The stories apparently went down like hotcakes. As the end of the year approaches, no prosecutor, deputy prosecutor, examining magistrate or court clerk doubts the accuracy of the image created.

As soon as November 1997, it was known to the re-reader that Regina Louf had been in contact with journalists. Her telephone was tapped 'to protect her'. As if it were an operation of damage control, two Brussels police officers went to see the parents of Christine Van Hees.*20 The parents were seen as unpredictable in the approaching storm. If they complained about the dismissal of De Baets and his detectives, the Brussels public prosecutor's office might face significant problems. But that risk is small, the BOB officers notice. Pierre Van Hees and Antoinette Vanhoucke indicate that they struggle with the stories of X1. They cannot and will not believe that their daughter could have ended up in a child prostitution network. On the other hand, they do not want to hear a bad word about De Baets' colleagues. 'From the interview, it appears that, on top of the feeling of injustice about this horrible and unpunished crime, the damaged reputation of their daughter hurts them even more,' the BOB employees report.*21

At the end of 1997, the parents were being worked on from two sides, and sometimes, they didn't know what to think anymore. The mother remembers how Aimé Bille told them one day that this was a critical case 'which might involve ex-ministers'. Antoinette Vanhoucke has the unpleasant feeling that some people are not at all concerned with finding the perpetrators but with 'progressing other dossiers'.*22 The parents are also contacted by members of the non-profit organisation Pour la Vérité. From the hands of founder Marc Reisinger, they receive 60,000 francs at the end of December, enabling them to afford a lawyer for the first time in almost fourteen years.*23 They also had contact at the end of 1997 with the authors of this book, who were at that time on the verge of bringing the X1 files into the public domain, and they assured them of all their support. 'In a way, yes', Pierre Van Hees replies when asked if he is happy with the publications in De Morgen and Télé Moustique. Because I partly provoked them. What I don't understand is why the investigation was stopped in June. I believe the dismissed five gendarmes had nothing to blame themselves for.*24

Amongst the X1-storm, X1 stays anonymous for another twenty days. Then Pascal Vrebos of Controversy (RTL) and Paul Bottelberghs of Panorama (VRT) talk her into revealing her

real name. The deciding factor is the somewhat naive idea that, in retrospect, she will at least be able to participate in the discussion about herself as Regina Louf. In her book, she describes the evening of the Panorama broadcast as a victory - the maximum she could achieve as a victim. In front of her husband's astonished eyes, she dances joyfully in her garden: 'Let me rejoice for once. Tomorrow, I will be demolished again. Tomorrow, they will say anything to ridicule my testimony.'²⁵

Indeed, at some editorial offices, journalists have been busying themselves for days 'discrediting' X1 as a fantasist. Every allegation finds its way effortlessly to the front pages, and since they almost always come from official sources - gendarmerie or public prosecutor - one can hardly blame the journalists. 'The urge to deny is so great that we can soon expect an article which tries to debunk that Christine Van Hees was tortured, murdered and burned. Someone must have been guilty of that crime, at least. Can we still agree on that?' Yves Desmet tries to appeal for reason.²⁶ He only reaps a public admonishment from Flemish media minister Eric Van Rompuy. In the Flemish parliament, he asks aloud what the situation is with 'the responsibility of the chief editor of a newspaper when he publishes things that later turn out to be wrong'.

As convinced as most journalists are, so too is the small group of people who take sides with Regina Louf in early 1998. One of them is Rufyn Nachtergaele. The Dutroux case has deeply moved this social worker from Ronse from the very beginning, and he has amassed the most complete collection of books, press cuttings and video recordings of TV documentaries on the topic at home. He began to investigate the origin of a very persistent X1 myth: the 'similarities' between her testimony and the book "Mijn Verhaal" (My Story), published in 1994 by the incest victim Yolanda from the Dutch village of Epe. In the early 1990s, she testified, to the dismay of Dutch public opinion, about child murders, illegal abortions and forced child prostitution. Yolanda also remained stoic despite the relentless criticism that erupted afterwards.

The first article pointing to "parallels" appeared on January 27 1998, in the Flemish tabloid Blik, according to Rufyn Nachtergaele. He is very sure of this, not only because he reads and collects all the stories, but also because a week later, the magazine reported with a shouty headline that the other media had taken over 'the scoop'. The similarities Blik lists are hilarious. Both Yolanda and Regina Louf say they are trying to process their past through dissociation. Both testify about a first pregnancy at age ten. Both point an accusing finger at their mother. Both were lent out as child prostitutes. In both cases, the main perpetrator was a friend of their mother. Both say that for a long time, they thought that permanent sexual abuse was a usual way of life. Yolanda talks about candles in her book, and Regina Louf does too. Both are 'intelligent and courageous women' and require their parents to admit they have made grave mistakes. 'You could compare it to two mail carriers who were both victims of a robbery in a different place', says Adjudant De Baets later. Both testify about a man with a nylon stocking over his head and a weapon in his hand. Both declare that since that robbery, they can't sleep at night anymore. Following Blik's logic, one of the two mail carriers should be arrested for making false testimonies.'

Initially, no one paid any attention to the story in Blik, according to Rufyn Nachtergaele. That is until the bulletin TerZake on VRT television fished it out three days later and enlarged it.*27 Two more 'points of similarity' were added to the list of Blik on television. In "My Story", Yolanda uses the imagery of the onion: 'Lately, I have begun to believe that my life story is only the first skin of the onion.' In Panorama, Regina Louf used the same metaphor. And there is more, says the TV programme's narrator. In her book, Yolanda described one of the perpetrators as Leo Wolff. In a fax about the murder of Katrien De Cuyper, Regina Louf talked about a certain 'De Wolf'.

Rufyn Nachtergaele bombarded the press with readers' letters pointing out that these were two variants of one of the most common names in the Low Countries. He checked all the names mentioned by Yolanda and found that apart from Wolff/De Wolf, there was no similarity. He also found it strange that the VRT journalists did not seem to know that the public

prosecutor in Neufchâteau had already identified the De Wolf identified by X1 a year earlier. None of Nachtergaele's readers' letters are published. The newspaper Het Volk does ramp up the tension by reporting that Yolanda's book was allegedly found during a search at the home of Tania V, Regina Louf's girlfriend. However, Tania V's house was not searched. While in January and February 1998, the newspapers were full of such stories, a timid attempt was made at the Antwerp public prosecutor's office to know the truth about what X1 declared about the murder of Katrien De Cuyper. The media storm has an unmistakable impact on the atmosphere among the investigators. There were thirty of them when, on January 28, 1998, at the request of the Antwerp examining magistrate Vyncke, they searched the castle in Gravenwezel. There was a discussion at the time,' one of them remembers. 'The domain where we were searching had changed owners since 1991. The places of interest had recently been demolished or were in a place we did not have a search warrant for. For a moment, we doubted whether we would ask for another search warrant for the other part, but the general mood was: what are we doing wasting our time with that crazy lady.'

On January 29, her birthday, Regina Louf was questioned again by detectives of the Antwerp Judiciary Police and the BOB of Brasschaat. On this occasion, she donated a few hairs. These are forensically tested along with some hairs found in the castle, but no match is found. The inside of the room to be examined appears to have just been renovated. Regina Louf is also asked to describe Katrien De Cuyper for a robot photo, which fails. It is not entirely clear whether the testimony of X1 in the De Cuyper dossier has led to anything like a real investigation. When Justice Minister Tony Van Parys was interviewed in the Chamber on October 21, 1998, he suddenly said this about the Antwerp X1 investigation: 'Investigative Judge Vincke has decided at the end of April 1998 to close the X1 dossier based on the conclusions of the coordination meetings with the magistrates of Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels.'

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In stark contrast to the politicians, magistrates, experts and journalists on television, a few people in Belgium feel uneasy. They don't know the truth either, at most some fragments. But

nobody asks them anything. At the Gent public prosecutor's office, criminal analysts have made a comparative analysis from behind their desks of X1's declarations about Carine Dellaert and what the old court records say about her. X1 says that `Clo' rarely went to school. The analysts quote classmate Barbara R: `She belonged to the elite class of the school.' The analysts see even more contradictions and lead the prosecution to conclude that Carine Dellaert could not possibly have been `Clo'. In the report, we also read that where X1 says that Clo `looked older' than her classmates, this was certainly not the case with Carine.*29

We called her Fanny V.*30. It took us two phone calls to find her. Few knew Carine Dellaert as well as she did. In 1977-'78 and 1978-'79, they sat together on the benches in the tiny urban school "Sisters Loveling" in the Van Hulthemstreet in Ghent. `We became friends in the sixth year', says Fanny. `I believe I was eleven or twelve at the time, Carine thirteen. What I can tell you dates back to that period.' Fanny laughs when she hears about the conclusions of the Ghent public prosecutor's office. The reports state that her friend was a diligent student who never had problems at home. `She was at least a year older than the rest of the class,' says Fanny. `She had already sat a year twice in primary school. I looked up to her very much. I was still a child; she was a real woman. She was much more physically and mentally developed than the rest of the class. When my mother heard that she had become my best friend, she complained to the school board because I had told my mother that Carine regularly had sex with her father and also with other men.'

`No, Carine was not happy, not at all. On the playground, sometimes we sat next to each other in silence on one of those benches. I felt that she suffered terribly in that situation. She wanted to run away from home; she talked about that very often: "Running away, far away from here." She told me that she had to sleep with many different men. It was not always clear to me how she considered that. Sometimes, when she told me, it seemed like she thought that was normal and enjoyable. But then, when we sat next to each other during playtime, I noticed something serious was happening to her.'

As far as Fanny remembers, Carine Dellaert told us it mainly happened at her home. `I was still a child, didn't

understand a thing and didn't ask any further. I remember that she told me that her mother knew nothing about it. I always asked her: what about your mother? What does she think about it? She's always away, she said. Did she ever talk about other places where she was abused? I don't remember. When I read in the newspaper that she had disappeared, it really hit me. When her body was discovered, even more so. I was sixteen by then and felt incredibly guilty. Why hadn't I called for help?'

In 1979, after primary school, Fanny V lost sight of Carine Dellaert. 'I never saw her again.' She went to another school and got to know other people there. One of them was—we're not making it up—Regina Louf. 'Regina hardly talked to anyone,' Fanny continued. 'Whether Regina and Carine could have known each other? That seems perfectly possible to me. Regina also had her secret, and she was very introverted. It would have been difficult for me to discover if Regina and Carine had known each other via that kind of network. At school, you only see the facade. I thought they were somewhat comparable in terms of attitude. I bought Regina's book, I don't dare read it. I've wanted to start it a few times already, but there are things in it that hurt me too much.'*31

The Ghent prosecutor's office has never interrogated Fanny, nor does it have time to do so. It has been decided 'to take a closer look at the person X1'. A few months later, Prosecutor Soenen summarises the result of this part of the investigation as follows: 'Schoolmates and classmates label these stories of Louf Regina as pure fantasy.'*32 Again, comparing the conclusions with the factual data is valid.

The first childhood friend of Regina Louf to be interviewed in the summer of 1997 is Kristelle M.*33. She was in the same class in the 1983-'84 and 1984-'85 school years and recalled that many shunned Regina because of her untidy appearance. 'She was someone with a lot of imagination, and sometimes someone would remark: she's going off on one again,' Kristelle M. remembers. She was also often absent, according to M: 'She sometimes disappeared from school in the afternoon.' If what this woman says is true, then the readers of the Van Hees file can fold a paper boat with the absence register, which they considered to be 'the proof' that Regina Louf could

not possibly have been in Brussels on the evening before February 13, 1984. According to this 'official document', she was absent without permission for a total of ten hours during the 1983-84 school year.

What mainly stuck with Kristelle M of Regina Louf is that she talked about sex constantly. She told them she was in a relationship with an older man. According to M, the entire class believed she was lying. Kristelle M knew she was not. She saw with her own eyes how this 'older man' came to pick up Regina after class. There was another thing: Regina told her at some point that she was pregnant by this older man. Kristelle M. also remembers that Regina often spoke about a 'friend with whom she had a good time and often went out in the Boudewijnstraat'. She does not remember that friend's name, 'but it could have been Christine, Carine, Caroline or Claudine'. Kristelle M can also shed light on the fact that Regina drank alcohol at the age of fourteen and arrived at class one morning 'smelling of drink'. On one occasion, she arrived at school with a clearly noticeable bruise. *34

With Michel B., the Ghent BOB traced a boy about whom Regina Louf declared that he was the friend of Natanja, a girl who, like herself, had ended up in prostitution and refused all cooperation with the BOB. Michel B. says he did not know Regina well and remembers her as 'rather quiet and withdrawn'. She left him 'a confident, mature impression'. He says she didn't care about the negative remarks about her. And: 'I think she had experienced something strange, but I don't know what. I think she talked to Natanja about it. It is remarkable to learn that the testimony of Michel B is quoted in the reports of the Ghent BOB as one of the validations that X1 made everything up.

Anja D was also interrogated. She was identified by some former classmates as the best friend Regina had in the years 1984 and '85. 'Even though X1 and Anja had a lot of contact with each other, she never noticed anything special outside the relationship between X1 and Tony at X1's home,' is how BOB's Jan Vincent - the fountain specialist - summarises the testimony in his synthesis of September 1 1997. Just what you call 'special'. Some passages from the actual interrogation of Anja D:

'You showed me a picture I recognised as Tony, the older man with whom X1 had a sexual relationship (...). I became aware of that relationship because I went to X1's house regularly. I slept over at X1's place at least one weekend a month (...). Sometimes, Tony took X1 upstairs to the room of X1's mother.

There, they had sexual relations. Tony came at any time. For example, Tony could also arrive very late in the evening. That there were sexual relations between X1 and Tony, I have confirmed myself. X1's room was just next to the mother's. It happened that I was still asleep, and Tony was having sex with X1 in the room next door at that time (...). I then walked past their room; the door was open. Then I saw X1 and Tony having sex. One time, by the way, Tony called out to me if I wanted to join in. I refused (...). As for the reaction of X1's parents, both were aware of the relationship. It is true, however, that X1's father was kept out of the loop as much as possible. However, the father did know about the relationship, but he was silent (...). It sometimes happened that Tony was away for a whole afternoon with X1; sometimes, it was just for a short time. X1 never told me where she had gone to.'*35

Anja D. says she met Regina Louf when she was 'fourteen to fifteen years old'. How old she was at the beginning of the relationship with Tony, Anja D does not know because: 'In my opinion, the relationship between this man and X1 had been going on for some time.' Anja D. was also asked if Regina Louf was often absent from school. 'She was, in my opinion, absent more than an average student. However, it certainly could not be called "much", her answer reads. This is the synthesis that BOB officer Vincent draws up about Anja D.'s statement: 'She was not absent or sick a lot.'

The next step in the Ghent investigation is the 'non-interrogation of Dirk Croux'. This is what it says verbatim in the official report with the number 103.415 of September 30 1997. Dirk Croux will not be interrogated. Period. Dirk Croux was living with Jeanine S, the ex-wife of Emile Dellaert, at the beginning of the nineties*36. He was asked whether Jeanine S had a butterfly tattooed on her shoulder - as X1 stated. No, Croux could not remember that, but he could talk about his ex

and other things. Jeanine S had repeatedly told him that she believed that Emile Dellaert knew more about the murder of his daughter.*37 However, the BOB officers do not have the slightest interest in what Croux has to say about the murder. They only want to know if Jeanine S had a tattoo.

Dirk Croux is not just anybody. As a Master Sergeant, he operated from the Air Force base at Kleine-Brogel for a while as an agent of the military intelligence service*38. It is not the kind of person from whom you could expect wild, unfounded conspiracy theories. On October 21 1996, not too long after the outbreak of the Dutroux case, Dirk Croux sent a handwritten report to the Parliamentary Commission for Combating Crime.*39 We read along: "My primary motivation for analysing the facts in the Dutroux case is the Carine Dellaert case (...). Carine Dellaert was found murdered in September 1985 after having been missing for three years. In this case, I have been a witness (...). I made a statement in which I suggested that it was not the father of Carine Dellaert who had committed the murder but that one had to look in the direction of human trafficking. I then handed over my entire file to the BOB (...). The father of Carine Dellaert was released due to lack of evidence, after which the case was covered up.'

In his report, Croux discusses the parallels he believes he has discovered in the organisation of what he calls 'the network surrounding Marc Dutroux' and the utterly ruthless behaviour of criminal organisations when they trade in human beings anywhere in the world. It all seems rather grotesque, but the least you can say is that we have here a testimony from a person in the immediate entourage of the Dellaert family who wants to provide an account which closely matches that of X1. The only mention of Croux's testimony in the Ghent BOB dossier is the message that Croux will not be interrogated. 'That doesn't surprise me,' says Regina Louf. After I appeared on television, I was contacted by people who knew me as a child. Among them was our veterinarian, who often visited my parents. He wanted to testify. So do it, I said. He called the BOB. They would get back in touch. Don't call us; we'll call you.*40 There is no mention of the vet in the Ghent dossier either. The vet hoped to tell the justice department how he had

seen mother and grandmother showing off photos of little Regina, taken in posh villas in Knokke. He found it strange that the two women seemed so proud of the fact that the child spent so much time there and deduced that 'she will go far'.

Early October 1997, the Ghent public prosecutor decided it was time to interrogate the husband of X1. His story starts with his first acquaintance on November 10 1984, when he rode a horse for the first time in the riding school Ponderosa in Destelbergen. It was she who wanted him at all costs. They had sex one week later. He was sixteen, she fifteen. 'It was the first time for me,' says Erwin Beeckman. 'I found that my wife already knew what she was doing. I did not have to take much initiative (...)'.

A few weeks after he lost his cherry, there was an equestrian gala at the riding school. It was then that I saw Tony V for the first time. I was with my sweetheart at that party when he came in. He sat down with her parents. She dropped me like a stone, so to speak.'

Erwin Beeckman recounts how he discovered that his girlfriend's parents saw much more in the forty-year-old Tony than in him. Regina nevertheless clung to Erwin, got him to attend the same school from the fourth grade, and tried to arrange things so she could be with him as often as possible. He did notice that certain things were not right. She wanted to get married right away. They were barely living together, or she came home with a dog - 'she told me she did this because she didn't feel safe at home alone.' The stories came later about how Tony checked via her mother when Edwin was there and when he wasn't. Then Tony came to pick up Regina again. Six months into their relationship, she told him that Tony had a key to the house, that he came and went as he pleased, and that she

had had no choice but to obey him for years. 'Later, I also learned from her that Tony took her to be abused by colleagues of his.

Did Beeckman ever notice any injuries or other outward signs of mistreatment? 'The first thing I noticed, almost from the beginning, was that my beloved had stretch marks on her belly and thighs. She later told me that she had already been

pregnant before our relationship. I don't remember what age this was. She told me that she had been pregnant several times. She also sported a lot of bruises back then, but she always fibbed that she had run into something or fallen.'*41

In a later statement, Erwin Beeckman divulged that his mother also noticed the stretch marks when the two of them stayed the night when she entered the bathroom at the wrong moment. In March 1998, Beeckman's former girlfriend called into the justice department. The woman still knew Beeckman's grandmother well and vividly recalled how she was worried about her grandson's future wife. 'She said she had a "scarred body,"' the friend remembers. 'She spoke of big scars and stretch marks and added that she looked like she had been pregnant.'*42 The mother can confirm what she saw, but the grandmother cannot - she has since died.

During his interrogation, Erwin Beeckman stated that he noticed that his wife had a severe injury on her genitals. The Ghent BOB later translates Beeckman's interrogation in a synthesis note for the public prosecutor as follows: '...her husband stated that she has a few scars on her body.'*43

'I could not believe what I was hearing. My daughter Gini, witness X1? She accused my wife and me of the most heinous sexual crimes. My daughter claims that she was put into child prostitution in Knokke by her grandmother and then in Ghent by her mother. My wife almost had a stroke when she heard it. We don't understand anything about it. Gini must be sick; there is no other explanation.'

With this comment, the Dutch-speaking public of Belgium was introduced to the parents of X1 on January 19 1998. It is the opening sentence of an article in the newspaper Het Volk, where journalist Marc Eeckhaut first came up with the simple idea of asking their opinion. Georges Louf immediately wins many hearts. At first glance, he seemed like the most affable grandfather you could imagine - a retired worker with a soft-spoken Ghent accent and appearing genuinely offended. On the day of the publication of the first interview with X1, in De Morgen, Georges Louf drove to his daughter's house and told

her, as he told us, 'Child, I tell you, do you know what will happen? They are going to put you in a psychiatric

facility. They are going to take away your children. Her mind is confused; it can't be helped. She has a whole library full of Stephen King books. Maybe that's why.'*44

A hundred magistrates could appear on television to report that the X1 testimony is false; none of them could speak with as much moral authority in the eyes of public opinion as Georges Louf. The name of Tony - described in the press until then as T - does ring a bell, he explains. He was a very friendly salesman from Antwerp who, until 1988, regularly came 'to drink a cup of coffee when he was in the neighbourhood'. He hadn't noticed anything, absolutely nothing, of inappropriate behaviour towards his daughter. He hasn't heard from Tony for years, he adds.

Based on facts, X1's parents are quickly exposed, although most of the press keeps this quiet. The BOB recorded telephone calls between the parents and Tony V.*45. The parents initially flatly denied this but then suddenly remembered a telephone call from Tony to 'wish the mother a happy birthday'. Christiane Poupaert's birthday is on May 21. The phone call is dated May 28.

The TV images look like they have been staged. A tearful father with childhood photos of his *Regineke* on his lap - 'I still love her' - and Christiane Poupaert strapped to a respirator. She suddenly suffers a violent flare-up of shortness of breath and takes gulps of air for several minutes when journalists signal to her that phone calls with Tony went both ways. 'It's impossible,' she finally utters. 'I can't even make phone calls anymore. I can't even handle the buttons anymore.'*46 The mother's condition does indeed seem problematic. Despite her low-oxygen condition, she retained a smoking habit - the filterless brand Saint-Michel.

Georges Louf remains unflappable. His daughter was never short of anything. Counting on his fingers, he lists the number of times he helped her financially: purchasing the house, her business, toys for the children... His conviction that everything 'our Regine' tells us is a fabrication based, among other things, on his firm conviction that until she met Erwin, she never even

went out. 'She went to a dance once and returned home before midnight. She didn't enjoy herself there. We were even a little worried about that at the time. She lay on the sofa every night watching TV.'

When Georges Louf was invited to submit his story to the Ghent BOB on January 26, he spent an entire afternoon telling his life story. At fourteen, he took up a job at the Ghent textile factory UCO, where he worked until his retirement. He met his future wife in her brother's bakery on the Ledeborgplein in Ghent. She was from Knokke. Christiane suffered two miscarriages in the 1950s. She tried to reconcile herself with the idea of never being able to have children and went to work. The miracle happened in 1968 when she suddenly became pregnant at thirty-two. Family life was already completely out of sync to raise a child. Little Regina was entrusted to a foster mother during the week. When, after two years, her health began to deteriorate, they decided to bring Regina to Christiane's mother in Knokke. 'I find it appalling to hear what she now accuses her grandmother of. I tell you, she was very happy with her grandmother.'

It is 8 pm before the subject of Tony is raised. He and his wife met him in the 1981-'82 period as a representative for the company Gimpet, says Georges Louf. 'We got to know Tony fairly quickly, and eventually, he was a friend of the house.' Tony then went to work for an advertising company but continued to come to the house 'as a friend'. Tony occasionally stayed the night in Regina's room but claimed she slept in their bedroom. 'It was true that Tony often came when I was not home, ' Georges Louf recalls. 'I trusted my wife and Tony, and I can say that I never found out that my wife and Tony had anything to do with each other. I don't believe Tony had anything to do with Regina. I never noticed anything like that at the time, let alone that there was any suspicious behaviour. I recently learned from my wife that Regina was in love with Tony when she was fifteen. '*47

Only two weeks after this interrogation, the BOB questioned him again, which unexpectedly resulted in this statement:

After the open conversation we have just had about this, I must admit that it is indeed true that Tony - in the period 1982-1985 - came to my house far too much for my liking (...). Eventually, he came to our house several times a week and more, sometimes several times a day. Tony finally took it to the point that he even came to our house late at night, at 11 pm. There were even days when I had already gone to sleep, yet he stayed with my wife until 1 or 2 in the morning (...). I couldn't stand up to Tony, though. It is probably my character, but I could not restrain Tony's arrogance (...). He was also far too friendly and drew towards Regina way too easily. I established that, and I couldn't do anything about it. All things considered, therefore, I did not protect my daughter. I knew Tony sometimes went out with Regina, either to the cinema or to take her to his job. He claimed that Regina was helping him to create subtitles. I had little to say about that; ultimately, my wife usually allowed Regina to go with him. I guess my wife must have known about it(...).*48

The press did not speak a word about this statement. Georges Louf continued to proclaim his message undisturbed, for example, in a lengthy interview with the RTBf program *Au Nom de la Loi* a short time later: his daughter had a completely normal and carefree childhood. He also continued to release childhood pictures supposed to visualise 'the proof': his Regineke was smiling. The press absorbs it like a sponge.

It takes the BOB quite a lot of effort to interrogate Christiane Poupaert. She can't leave her bed, so the BOB officers must visit her in the Grondwetstraat in Sint-Amandsberg. Mother Louf also willingly tells her life story and, at first, vehemently denies that Tony V ever caused any problems within the family. He came about once a week and only during the day. He did stay over 'twice,' she remembers. And yes, Regina was delighted when she heard he was coming. Upon his arrival, she kissed him. Christiane Poupaert also reveals that at one point, she had secretly fallen in love with Tony, but nothing had ever happened - neither between her nor Tony nor between Tony and Regina. During her interrogation, she suggests to the investigators: 'Of the

girlfriends at the time, I remember Kathy Neukens, a neighbour girl who liked to come here and play with the dogs.' It sounds innocent and helpful. It seems to indicate that Regina Louf's mother has a good memory. A little later, there is little evidence of that: 'You ask me about Anja D. The name rings a bell, but I don't remember her. I don't remember whether she slept here or whether she was a friend of Regina's. I really don't remember anything. You tell me that Anja D has stated that she once saw Tony and Regina in bed at my home. I do not know anything about that (...). You now tell me that at school, it was generally known that she had a relationship with an older man, and she said so herself. She even said she had sex with that man and was pregnant by him. I don't know anything about that.'*49

Who was Kathy Neukens? 'A good friend of Tony's, but definitely not of mine,' says Regina Louf when she suddenly sees her alleged childhood friend appearing in almost all the daily and weekly magazines and even on television, from *Het Volk en Blik* to *La Dernière Heure*, *Le Soir Illustré*, and a special broadcast of the VTM program *Telefacts*. It seems that Kathy Neukens has a manager behind her who arranges everything.

The BOB questions Kathy Neukens on January 31, 1998. In contrast to most of the acts of investigation in the 'family' section, this interview did not happen in Ghent but at the antenna-Neufchâteau, by Baudouin Dernicourt. Kathy Neukens reiterates that the parents and grandparents of Regina Louf were exemplary people, and she also believes she knew that Regina Louf was still a virgin when she met Erwin. She can't say a bad word about Tony V. Even in her memory, he was someone who, as a friend of the house, only occasionally stopped by for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. 'I have never seen him be handsy, neither towards me nor towards Regina.' Kathy Neukens claims she doesn't know of an Anja D, nor does the name Kristelle M mean anything to her.*50

The Ghent BOB has all the data needed to determine who Kathy Neukens is but does nothing. Her name is mentioned during the first interrogation of Georges Louf when he talks about the advertising films directed by Tony. 'The couple

Neukens, who were friends of ours, also feature in those films,' he explains.

'I remember a few films for restaurants and one for a striptease restaurant. If you dig deeper, you will find Kathy Neukens working in a videotape rental store in Ghent, where Tony often visited.'*51

The Ghent BOB is busy in the last days of January. Attempts are made to name Claudia V as the girl X1 described as 'Clo'. Phonetically, there could be a match, and for a moment, the press suggests that the judicial authorities are on the trail of 'the real Clo'. Claudia V is stupefied and denies she is Clo. On January 28, a week before his confession, the BOB searched Georges Louf's house and uncovered a lot of old photo albums. Then, it was the turn of Uncle André Poupaert to be interviewed, baker by profession and brother of Christiane Poupaert. He, too, can report that he is baffled by X1's revelations.*53 His son Daniël Poupaert, Regina's cousin, is bewildered too.*54 Marc V comes next. He was the physiotherapist of Regina Louf's grandmother at the time, and he lets it be known that he, too, was shocked. His son can confirm that, says Marc V*55. And indeed, the son does so. Anecdotaly, the son of the physiotherapist is currently one of the rising stars at the Vlaams Blok (far-right nationalist party) in Ghent.

Around this period, one Kathleen DP announces herself. The BOB has overlooked her in its search for her former classmates. Kathleen DP is left conflicted about what she has read about the X1 case in the press. In her mind, Regina Louf always told outlandish stories, but she could never catch her on a lie. On the other hand, she noticed that Regina Louf, during her interview with Sonja Barend on Dutch television, used a sentence she once wrote in a letter to Regina: If you tell the truth and save one child, it's worth it. However, Kathleen DP divulges other items that the BOBs apparently have no further interest in. She became pregnant a total of nine times, made several suicide attempts, had problems with her father as a child and got along very well at school with Regina Louf. From her interrogation, she clearly wants to support her widely criticised friend from her school days. She does so when she confirms the high levels of truancy in the RMS of

Sint-Amandsberg. Kathleen DP explains how she went about this: 'I made notes in my diary to explain the absences.' It was that easy.*56

On January 28, a confrontation occurs between Regina Louf and her father under the watchful eyes of substitute Nicole De Rouck and prosecutor Soenen. There is something strange about Nicole De Rouck's demeanour during this videotaped conversation. Before Father Louf is allowed into the interrogation room, she secludes herself there with Regina Louf. Witness X1 weeps. As confident as she showed herself to the media over the past few days, she seems to be heavily burdened by the proclamations of her parents and Kathy Neukensen of this world. Nicole De Rouck encourages her and believes she knows that her parents still love her—that sort of thing. The magistrate secretly keeps the camera running. It is as if

she speculates that during this intimate moment—women among themselves—X1 will discredit her entire story. A good amount of time passes, but what some seem to hope for does not happen. Instead, X1 sheds more tears before Georges Louf enters the interrogation room at 4:15 p.m.

- But child, I don't remember you saying anything to us... about the situation at Grandma's?
- But yes, I have...
- No, child, that's not true. You mustn't say that. We would never have allowed it. You also have four children. Would you have allowed it all these years knowing that?
- And the time of Tony... Everyone knew, and everyone allowed it.
- Yes, child, you were very friendly to that man, too, weren't you?
- What was I supposed to do, for God's sake?! What was I supposed to do? How am I supposed to explain that?

Nicole De Rouck intervenes:

- She was only twelve years old. You know, she dealt with Tony in a way that a child of twelve facing a man much older could not be so open or so abnormal.

- Yes, madam, that man was sympathetic to us. And Regina found him charming too.
- If other people, outsiders, saw that there was an affair, then as a father, you must have seen it too, right?
- I never saw that he approached my child sexually. I never saw that.

Regina Louf notes that her mother did see everything.

- I don't know about that, child.
- Haven't you talked to each other about it in the last few weeks?
- No.
- That's unbelievable. How can you not talk to each other about that? I can't, really, I can't.
- We can't believe you stayed with your grandmother in those rooms all those years, as you say. Is there any proof of that? Has anyone already come forward who has experienced such things?
- How can I prove that now? Do you think the evidence is in my hands? (...).
- But child, anyway. Let us now speak. How did you get into these networks you speak of?
- I certainly didn't get out because of you. That is a fact (...).
- But why do you say such things now that you were abused?
- Why do I say such things? Because it's the fucking truth, Dad!
- But all these years, Régine, I don't remember you saying that. We never saw anything... that you were abused, mistreated...
- No? Then how come I got my period so fast? How come I developed so quickly? How come I was fully grown at 12 years old and grew no further? Don't you think those are cues?
- I'm not a doctor, hey... That will be determined then.
- (...) Excuse me father; he even had a key.
- I don't know about that. That's what you say. And my wife says that's not true.*57

On February 3, 1998, it was finally Tony V's turn. Antwerp and Brussels detectives have searched his apartment. What use that can still be may be doubted. As far as his buddy at the

BOB of Brasschaat had not warned him about the search, the media already did. For a month, people have talked about little else than case-X1. The interrogation of Tony V takes place in Ghent and reflects what he has stated in the press the days before. 'I know neither Nihoul nor Dutroux nor all those other persons mentioned by Regina,' it is said in Het Volk. 'I have never touched Regina.' Tony V says he only visited the Loufs to drink coffee and read the advertising magazines to get new clients and make business calls. It was still in the days before the invention of the cell phone.*58

According to sources within the Ghent public prosecutor's office, substitute De Rouck raises her voice from that moment on for the first time. It's getting too much. After almost a month of inactivity, Tony V was brought to Ghent on March 12 to be confronted with three women who had previously confirmed parts of X1's story.*59 Tony claimed he had never seen them before. For the public prosecutor in Ghent, things have become tricky. It is challenging to declare all those women crazy.

April 23, 1998, is not only Michel Nihoul's birthday but also a historic date for the investigations that, a good year before, had led politicians and journalists to conclude that the end of Belgium was in sight. That day, all the magistrates involved met again, this time to jointly decide that the "X1-inquiry" had not yielded any results for any of the murders investigated and that the antenna-Neufchâteau could soon be dismantled. In the middle of the meeting, someone storms into the room with exciting news: Marc Dutroux has escaped!

A few hours before, Stéphane Michaux became the new folk hero in the woods around Neufchâteau. Tony V reported two hundred kilometres away to the BOB in Ghent for the third time. It is difficult to understand the events of that chaotic day. It seems that somewhere in a Belgian backroom, a compromise has been reached. Perfectly simultaneous - almost to the minute, in fact - with the formal decision to close the X1 files, Tony V starts talking.*60 It goes like this:

"Today at 1.30 p.m. I presented myself at your invitation to be interrogated here in the case of Regina Louf. I,

therefore, confirm that I had an open talk with you beforehand and that at 2.45 p.m. I now realise that it is better to tell the whole truth. I must now clearly state to you, and therefore also freely confess, that I indeed had a relationship with Regina Louf in her youth and consequently also had sex with her. From my previous statements, you know how I met the Louf family from Ghent. When I got to know this family, they also had a daughter who was 12 years old at the time. The girl was already quite developed in physiognomy for her age, or in other words, she was almost a grown woman (...). I do remember that it was Regina who took the initiative and started to court me. I must admit that at that time, as an adult man, I did not ask myself any questions (...). This relationship with Regina lasted for about a year. You tell me that other statements show that it was at least two years, but without wanting to argue about this, I think it was only one year at the most (...). The sex and the actions I had with her at that time were, in my opinion, normal. With this, I mean that I certainly did not indulge in more extreme forms with her, such as experiencing SM or other forms which the community may consider as more extreme. I may state here that it was usually Regina who made the first move to what you may call 'go upstairs' (...). I do remember with certainty that when I had my first coitus with her, Regina was certainly no longer a virgin. I think I can say that from experience (...). Indeed, at some point, I received a key to the house from Christiane, without her husband's knowledge, so I could come and go when it suited me (...). I have always had a 'normal' relationship with Regina, and I have certainly never asked her to bed with other men.'*61

At the end of this interrogation follows the apotheosis of the X1 investigation: the confrontation between Regina and Tony. She has been waiting on a bench in the gendarmerie office since the afternoon. He is treated kindly by the BOB officers present. They make jokes and apologise for having made him come all the way from Antwerp to Ghent for this ridiculous affair. Tony V is courteous and wants to clear up 'all misunderstandings'. In contrast to the confrontation with her father, no hidden cameras are rolling now. We are not in Brussels; here in Ghent, we work professionally', Regina Louf

overheard a police officer say. In the opening lines of the official report, lead constable Eric Van der Meulen and First Sergeant Julien Wynsberghe thought it worthwhile to give their personal appreciation of the confrontation: 'The confrontation starts at 16.45 and ends at 21.30. The confrontation is rather awkward, mainly due to Louf's attitude, which manifested

itself, for example, by not answering for minutes, so the question had to be raised repeatedly, and an answer had to be insisted upon. While Regina Louf initially responded in a very neutral and calm manner, she changed her attitude at a particular moment. She started to accuse V. She tells him that it's the easiest thing for him to deny everything. V remains stoic during this emotional outburst of Louf. He doesn't say a word, doesn't blame her and only asks her to say what she needs to say.'*62

At the end of the confrontation, Regina Louf will dispute the paper record made by the BOB officers. According to her, they failed to record that Tony V admitted at some point that he did lend her out. She first refused to sign the text and later said that the BOB officers threatened to leave her alone with Tony in the office if she did not. Tony V did sign the minutes without any amendment. If that is a correct account of the confrontation, a discussion immediately ensued about Regina Louf's age when he first took her. Twelve years old, she says - which also seems to be consistent with the logic behind the confession Tony V made a few hours earlier. 'I seem to remember it was more between her fourteenth and sixteenth years,' he replicates in the police record. According to Regina Louf, Tony V first said 'twelve years' and then asked the BOB officers to change that to 'thirteen'. Which they did, as will be seen further.

- In what ways did you have sex with Tony?
- Regina: 'It happened everywhere, as just mentioned, and this both orally and vaginally. It also happened with my mother present, during which she was not only a spectator but also an active participant.'

- Tony: 'What Regina says is correct, except that her mother was there. I never had sex with her while her mother watched or participated.'

Other question:

- Did you have to prostitute yourself for Tony?
- Regina: 'Yes.'
- Tony: 'Total fabrication.'

Regina Louf talks about the first time Tony lent her to a colleague after a night out at the annual summer street festival in Ghent ("De Gentle Feesten"). He denies the facts. She tells her story again about the bar along the Drongensesteenweg, the film studio in 'the factory', and the sex parties in the villa of a businessman from Ghent. 'I don't know anything about that,' Tony replied. Regina Louf tells her story about her four pregnancies and how the babies were murdered. 'I never knew Regina was pregnant,' says Tony.

- Are you familiar with the address Legevoorde in Waarschoot?
- Tony: 'No, absolutely not.'
- Regina: 'What Tony is saying now is a lie. He knows quite well where the villa is, in Waarschoot.'*63

This was a setback if the detectives had hoped that Regina Louf would withdraw all her accusations during the confrontation. They succeeded more when confronting her the next day with Emile Dellaert. Regina Louf remains in a fetal position in her chair and says almost nothing. She has decided to cease cooperating with the investigation, and this is eagerly interpreted as proof that she never knew Carine Dellaert.* 64.

Anyone who thought the debate was hereby closed is mistaken. It is clear that Tony V abused Regina Louf from the age of twelve - which makes a world of difference from fourteen years in criminal law. At the end of April, substitute De Rouck speaks in interviews about a sexual relationship that began 'from the age of twelve'. But, she adds, the facts have reached the statute of limitations in the meantime and 'she

has sought rapprochement. Only after the Dutroux case did she interpret this as abuse.*65 The Antwerp children's rights activist Rita Hey of the non-profit organisation Mothers Against Incest had enough. She files a complaint against De Rouck for launching a public appeal to all paedophiles in Belgium to commit adultery with children of twelve. Once again, the public prosecutor's office in Ghent follows Stalin's example and simply changes the facts. It is the beginning of a crusade to convince everyone that it was fourteen years old, among other things, in a press release that reacted to a public statement by Adjudant De Baets: 'In the public interest, we wish to refute certain allegations. The fact that "Tony" during the confrontation with Regina Louf and the interrogation by the BOB in Ghent would have confessed or admitted that he lent Regina Louf to other men is incorrect. The age of Regina Louf during the sexual relationship with Tony was not 11-12 years, but about 14 years to 15 years. This is evident after comparing the statements of the various witnesses and those involved.*66

Here we go again. The very last official report drawn up by the Gent BOB on the X1 affair dates from June 2, 1998, and is headed 'general conclusions'. It is the conclusion of the investigation and the factual verdict on which the public prosecutor bases himself to close the investigation. And what do we read there: 'It has therefore been established that between the ages of twelve and sixteen, Regina had a sexual relationship with a much older and adult man.' In the same document, on page 18, the course of the investigation is again succinctly summarised. And there we read: 'During the confrontation, Tony V admitted, and this is contrary to what he had previously stated to our services, that he had sexual contact with Regina from the age of twelve until the age of sixteen.*67 In the confrontation report, Tony V states: 'I seem to remember that it was more between her fourteenth and sixteenth years.' Regina Louf had valid reasons for not wanting to sign this paper.

On May 21, Christiane Poupaert was interrogated once more. It was the second-to-last act of investigation carried out by the Ghent BOB. And what do we suddenly read there? In response to a remark by one of her interrogators, the mother of Regina

Louf says, 'I hear from you now that Tony and she claim that they already had a relationship when she was twelve. If that was so, I can only say that I knew nothing about it.'

There are other striking details in the very last statement of Christiane Poupaert, who passed away six months later. This is pretty much her testament. 'I must now confess that this is correct', she answers at the beginning of her interrogation, when she is questioned about the relationship between her daughter and Tony V. She insists, however, that her daughter was already fourteen at the time. It was also 'at Regina's insistence' that she offered Tony a key, she adds. He could come in at any time now, but he often used it when he dropped by early in the morning and chatted with me in my bedroom for a bit, after which he went to find Regina in her bedroom. I knew, of course, that he was having relations with Regina there at the time, but I was not in a position to do anything about it.'

Further in the interrogation, Christiane Poupaert admits that she opposed Erwin Beeckman staying overnight at their home. The daughter was thus allowed to sleep with a forty-year-old but not with her soon-to-be husband, who was about the same age. This seems to be nothing but the posthumous confirmation of what Bourlet and Connerotte and their detectives always suspected: the domestic conditions of X1 contained all the necessary ingredients to create the horrors she testified to. Christiane Poupaert reveals something else that day. She claims there is a baby's body buried in the garden of the grandmother Poupaert in Knokke.

Regina Louf says she never knew what happened to the four babies they took from her. She believes two of the four clandestine births happened in Knokke. She told her friend Tania V that she thought one of the babies was buried in her grandmother's garden in Knokke.*68

Christiane Poupaert now states:

'You now also tell me that Regina not only claims that she had a child but that it was buried in our garden even? This is pure nonsense from Regina, but I can tell you that I have indeed had two miscarriages. The first child was born when it was five and a half months old. I was with family here in Ghent when, at some point, I became unwell. Then,

suddenly, the amniotic fluid broke, and the baby came into the world. It was indeed dead. We called for a doctor, but I don't recall who it was. (...). Because the baby was less than six months old, the doctor told us not to report it. My mother then took the body to Knokke and buried it in the garden.

We did this to keep the baby with us. I remember that the baby's body was placed in a large cardboard box. It was a package for a Christmas cake from my brother André, a baker. By the way, it happened at André's house. I remember it was a beautiful baby. You could already see the eyes and such. It had no wrinkles. It was physically perfect, but it still had to grow.'*69

It's almost like a scene from Monty Python. A doctor makes a house call and attends to a woman who had a miscarriage. He gives her the necessary care, then puts on his coat and says: "I'm out of here; go ahead and take care of your foetus. After that, grandmother stuffs the corpse into a cake box and takes the train to Knokke to bury it there... To complete the sketch, the Ghent public prosecutor doesn't even seem to feel the need to question these events and takes the explanation for granted. The reason is that André Poupaert confirmed this sequence of events.*70

If Christiane Poupaert's claims about the foetus' faith are valid, then this was not only illegal but, above all, extremely unusual. According to a law dating from 1806, doctors in our country are obliged to report any miscarriages they witness to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registrar. The child does not actually get registered by this act alone, but the law does state very clearly that any detection of a miscarriage must be reported. In the 1950s, no law allowed babies to be buried in one's garden. A doctor who leaves a family with a five-and-a-half-month foetus and advises them to bury it in their backyard may be considered unique—a doctor risks being suspended for this kind of intervention.

A few days after Regina Louf's first appearance on television, Marc Verwilghen finds a letter drafted in shaky handwriting among his mail, written by Gaby Gomme, a pensioner from Ghent. Gaby Gomme grew up in Knokke and experienced the

liberation of World War 2 there. Gaby Gomme remembers the events like yesterday. Just like in the rest of the country, in Knokke, some collaborators quickly put on the caps of resistance fighters. The result: much chaos. On November 2 1944, after the capitulation of the German commander Eberding and the day before the arrival of the Canadians, all collaborators were herded together on the square of the girls' school of Knokke-Le Zoute. 'It only lasted one day', Gaby Gomme remembers. 'I came from a family that leaned towards the right-wing Flemish National Union, so I also ended up in that school. Nothing terrible happened there, you know. When I think back on it now, it was more like some fanfare. But what I remember most was the workers' hilarity when they brought her there. Everyone shouted: haha, the madam! They were referring to Madame Cécile, Regina Louf's grandmother.'

According to Gaby Gomme, this is 'generally understood' among the old folk of Knokke and unanimously accepted as a taboo subject. 'During the war, Madame Cécile hosted a private club called King Georges,' she continues. 'There, German officers came to be pampered by girls from the area. There was also another brothel for the ordinary soldiers. I think it makes perfect sense that Regina Louf ended up in prostitution at a young age. Many people knew that her grandmother was into that sort of thing, for the fancier folk.'

A gruelling search of retirement homes and speaking to local historians in Knokke yield plenty of evasive behaviour and well-intentioned advice not to stir up that particular bit of history. Some people think they know that the club was called Rio and reopened after the war at a different address. Others believe it was the Cap Nord and add that 'Madame Cécile' and her husband lived 'right next door'. Others doubt the whole story. Half a century later, in Au Nom de la Loi, Georges Louf shows off the decorations bestowed on Cécile Beernaert for her services to people and country. Each peripheral story in the X1 saga is black on one side and white on the other. The Ghent public prosecutor's office has never interrogated Gaby Gomme.

NOTES:

1. Het Nieuwsblad January 27, 1998.
2. In the presence of Patriek De Baets and Danny De Pauw.
3. Interrogation X1, 31 May 1997, BOB Ghent, PV 102.688.
4. BOB Ghent, August 6, 1997, PV 108.062.
5. Autopsy report Carine Dellaert, September 25 1985, included in synopsis BOB Brussels, January 7 1997, PV 100.242.
6. Report of telephone contact with Gwendolina Dellaert, BOB Ghent, August 26 1997, PV 103.076.
7. Summary report Dellaert Carine, BOB Ghent, October 16 1997, PV 103.995
8. Interrogation X1, October 25 1996, BOB Brussels, PV 116.018.
9. BOB Ghent, September 18 1997, PV 103.289.
10. The authors made observations during an on-site visit on January 16 and April 20, 1999.
11. 'X1 lies from A to Z', Het Nieuwsblad 29 January 1998.
12. BOB Ghent, September 1, 1997, PV 103.011.
13. BOB Ghent, July 31, 1997, PV 102.940.
14. BOB Ghent, August 6, 1997, PV 108.062.
15. List of official reports drawn up by the gendarmerie BOB Gent in the file GE.30.18.182411/85/RO.
16. Interview with Dr Eddy De Valck, March 12 1999.
17. Obelix meeting report, May 22 1997, A.3/145/97.
18. BOB Brussels, November 13 1997, PV 152.536.
19. Minutes with 'Information coming from a person who wishes to preserve anonymity', Jean-Claude Leys, August 29 1997.
20. It concerns Patrick Noller of the antenna-Neufchâteau and Didier Gelders of the 1KOS.
21. Brussels BOB, November 24 1997, PV 151.083.
22. Telephone contact with Antoinette Vanhoucke, October 23 1997.
23. The donation from the non-profit organisation that has backed X1 and the De Baets team is unconditional. The money will be used to pay the fees of Brussels lawyer Michelle Hirsch. Later, she will speak out against the non-profit organisation and 'some journalists' at a press conference. Later, she will even file a lawsuit on behalf of the parents against Marc Reisinger and Regina Louf.
24. 'I ask myself questions', interview with Pierre Van Hees, La Dernière Heure, January 8 1998.

25. "Silence is for perpetrators", Regina Louf, Houtekiet/Fontein 1998, page 252.
26. De Morgen, January 17, 1998.
27. 'In de ban van Yolanda', Terzake, Canvas, 30 January 1998.
28. Report public meeting committee-Justice, Chamber of Representatives, October 21, 1998.
29. Report 'Overlaps and Contradictions', Gent gendarmerie, 28 May 1997.
30. Fanny is a pseudonym.
31. Interview with Fanny V, March 31, 1999.
32. Press conference public prosecutor Ghent, June 12, 1998.
33. The man questioning Kristelle M. is First Sergeant Jan Vincent.
34. Synthesis of interrogations of school friends of X1, BOB Ghent, September 1, 1997, PV 103.011.
35. Interrogation Anja D., BOB Ghent, September 25 1997, PV 103.387.
36. Jeanine S. is not Carine Dellaert's mother.
37. Interrogation Dirk Croux, BOB Ghent, June 3, 1997, PV 102.249.
38. The airbase in Kleine Brogel appears in the testimonies of some incest victims who take their stories to the Neufchâteau police. These victims claim that some soldiers were involved in violent sex parties with children. According to these testimonies, on January 20 1997, Prosecutor Bourlet opened an informative investigation dossier with the number T 1159/96. Nothing more is heard of it later.
39. Croux still does not know the existence of the Verwilghen Commission, which was formed four days after his testimony.
40. Interview with Regina Louf, June 29, 1998.
41. Interrogation of Erwin Beeckman, BOB Ghent, October 8, 1997, PV 103.493.
42. Interrogation Winny L., BOB Ghent, March 26 1998, PV 103.917.
43. BOB Ghent, October 16, 1997, PV 103.995, page 34.
44. 'Parents of X1 speak', Het Volk, January 19 1998.
45. On May 28, 1997, Tony V called the telephone number of father and mother X1 at 7:50 p.m. The call lasted 18 minutes and 59 seconds: Determinations BOB Brussels, May 29, 1997, PV 151.517.

46. Interview with Georges Louf and Christiane Poupaert, January 20, 1998.
47. Interview of Georges Louf, BOB Ghent, January 26, 1998, PV 100.292.
48. Interview Georges Louf, BOB Ghent, February 6, 1998, PV 100.466.
49. Interview with Christiane Poupaert, BOB Ghent, January 27, 1998, PV 100.539.
50. Interview with Kathy Neukens, Brussels police station, January 31, 1998, PV 150.183.
51. The Louf-Poupaert family also mentions Kathy Neukens in their statements as the cause of the phone call on May 28, 1997. Tony V wandered into Neukens' sandwich bar by chance and inquired about Christiane Poupaert. He learned that she was ill and decided to call.
52. Interrogation Claudia B., BOB Ghent, January 29, 1998, PV 100.320.
53. Interrogation André Poupaert, BOB Ghent, January 29, 1998, PV 100.356.
54. Interview Daniël Poupaert, BOB Ghent, January 29, 1998, PV 100.368.
55. Interview Marc V, Ghent police force, January 29, 1998, PV 100.364.
56. Interrogation Kathleen D.P, BOB Ghent, February 17, 1998, PV 100.591.
57. Confrontation between Georges and Regina Louf, BOB Ghent, January 28 1998, PV 103.198.
58. Het Volk, January 23, 1998.
59. It concerns Myriam Verstraeten, Nora De Boodt (X7) and Anja D.
60. The magistrates' meeting starts at 14.00, and Tony V.'s confessions will follow at 2.45 p.m.
61. Interrogation Tony V, BOB Ghent, April 23, 1998, PV 104.897.
62. BOB Ghent, April 23, 1998, PV 104.898, continuation no. 1.
63. Confrontation between Regina Louf and Tony V, Ghent BOB., April 23, 1998, PV 104.898.
64. Confrontation between Regina Louf and Emile Dellaert, Ghent P.O.B., April 24, 1998, PV 104.917.
65. De Morgen, April 30, 1998.

66. Communication public prosecutor Ghent, Belga, October 8, 1998.
67. Investigation following Louf Regina's statements, General Conclusion, BOB Ghent, June 2, 1998, p. 105.564.
68. Interrogation of Tania V, Brussels police station, 7 March 1997, PV 150.652.
69. Interrogation Christiane Poupaert, BOB Ghent, 6 May 1998, PV 105.154
70. Interrogation André Poupaert, BOB Ghent, May 19, 1998, PV 105.371.
71. Interview with Gaby Gomme, March 2, 1998.

6. 'So I was rather demanding regarding the snail issue, but when my eye fell on the Melanoides tuberculatus, I knew.'

A lead to uncover the X1 conspiracy, January 1998

At a traffic stop, a man sitting in a blue Ferrari beckoned over a nearby police officer:

- Officer, my car was stolen!
- What kind of car is it?
- A blue Ferrari.

- But you're currently sitting behind the wheel of such a vehicle?!
- Oh my gosh, how distracted I was... I am very sorry to have bothered you, officer.

The police officer decided not to let this one go. Regardless of the difficult-to-deny proof to the contrary, he decided to start a thorough investigation into the theft of a non-stolen blue Ferrari. The more he was confronted with the objective fact that the car wasn't stolen, the more he convinced himself that he was on the cusp of unveiling a major crime. With total surrender, he poured his energy into this year-and-a-half-long investigation without doubting its significance.

That, in a nutshell, is the history of the dossier nr. 231197 of Brussels investigating judge Jacques Pignolet. On September 30, 1997, he was appointed to investigate a case of 'falsification of writings by an official in the exercise of his functions and use thereof'. Based on the complaint filed by Commander Duterme on August 26, '97, concerning the controversial photo P10, the Brussels Prosecutor's Office considered that there were sufficient grounds to believe that adjutant De Baets had falsified the X1 investigation.

The fierce reaction of the prosecutor's office may seem exaggerated to the outsider, but it is the most natural thing in a state of law. Every police officer who attains the rank of judicial officer swears an oath before the Crown Prosecutor to provide fair and objective notice of his or her findings. The police officer is supposed to be like a camera, an instrument that allows the magistrate to gain a transparent view of the facts. Although in practice, it is often the case that police officers slightly modify or change their representation of the facts -people remain people- a magistrate, confronted with indications of manifest falsification of investigative data, must investigate the matter and take action. That is also why the law calls for a heavy penalty in such cases: fifteen years in prison. Justice simply cannot afford a margin of error.

Pignolet jumped straight into action: on the first day of his appointment, he contacted his colleague Jacques Langlois at Neufchâteau. He asked him to check whether the

interrogators questioning X1 at the time had neglected to report that X1 had pointed to the wrong photo during her interrogation on November 13 and that they imagined that X1 had, on the contrary, recognised Christine Van Hees. On the same day, Langlois sent a copy of PV 117.487 of December 6, 1996, which states word for word that the girl recognised by X1 in photo P10 is 'manifestly not' Christine Van Hees. This is the PV that Dutermé claims does not exist. It took Pignolet only a few hours to get his hands on it.

It is arguable the manner in which this report was submitted to the magistrates at the time: twenty days after X1's interrogation. There might also be something to say about the picture sleeves, the use of staples and the game of question and answer that dragged on into the morning hours. However, that is no longer an issue in this study. Pignolet had to quickly acknowledge that De Baets and his former co-investigator Hupez were not responsible for compiling the photo albums. These were produced by BOB officer and amateur photographer Peter De Waele. 'Neither I nor De Baets had ever seen those items before,' Philippe Hupez said later, in the interest of the investigation. The less we knew as interrogators, the more unbiased our investigation would be. That was our starting point. On November 13, I did not even know which photo was of Christine Van Hees, let alone who Anik D might be.' That, Hupez later tells Pignolet, is the straightforward explanation of why it took a while for a police report to be written. First, we had to find out who Anik D was and what had become of her. Hupez would later provide Pignolet with a note in which he formally claimed responsibility for all the reports drawn up about the interrogations of X1 that he had attended. It was agreed that he would take care of the paperwork, and Hupez continued to do so two years later. By the way, he wonders why there was such a fuss over such a futile issue. Hupez correctly reported what was to be documented and challenged anyone to prove otherwise.

Any sane person would ponder: who is trying to fool me here? Not Pignolet. He throws himself wholeheartedly into the investigation, hoping to demonstrate that the X1 dossier has been "made up". At the end of 1997, Pignolet was bombarded

with messages from fellow magistrates and investigators that the much-discussed

X-files were the product of large-scale manipulation. He soon realises that he is not alone. Prosecutor Benoît Dejemeppe gives him a letter from Lieutenant Colonel Jean-Marie Brabant, the number one of the Brussels BOB. Brabant claims an individual called Albert Mahieu contacted the Brussels BOB on September 3 with a 'tip': the named De Baets lives with ... a prostitute, so that you know.

Albert Mahieu is one of the aggrieved parties in the Assubel Insurance Group fraud case. That investigation is in the hands of Jean-Claude Van Espen. As Mahieu is acting as the representative of a group of shareholders, he has every interest in staying in the good books of this magistrate. Mahieu made no secret to the authors of his motives for encumbering De Baets. 'It would be a disaster if the position of Van Espen were to be compromised,' he said at the end of 1997. Mahieu helped circulate a false report by Committee P on the Di Rupo case via his website. It was also he who, in 1997,*1 at a well-attended press conference, made public a 'huge dossier' that was supposed to show that prosecutor Dejemeppe was a pimp and therefore was not fit to ensure the successful resolution of the Assubel case. Ultimately, nothing transpired except that Mahieu made questionable accusations based on dubious data. In October 1997, Dejemeppe must have known more or less the kind of person Mahieu was, but decided to transfer Brabant's letter to Pignolet regardless.

Once he read in the newspapers that the X1 dossiers were the work of Adjudant De Baets, he could see that the press was turning against De Baets. The former Schaerbeek police commissioner Johan Demol hurried to Pignolet.*2 He tells his story to detectives of the General Inspectorate of the gendarmerie. It goes like this. At the end of 1994, Johan Demol said a meeting was called at the Brussels public prosecutor's office. There, it was decided to tackle street prostitution in the capital. To his dissatisfaction, Demol, the commissioner of Schaerbeek, was not invited.*3 He feared that all prostitutes would be chased towards Schaerbeek from the neighbouring municipality of Sint-Joost-ten-Node and, therefore, started a series of control actions himself. It was in that period, says

Demol, in the year 1995, that De Baets came to visit the police station of Schaarbeek. He came to rummage through the reports on the control actions in the neighbourhood of the North Station. De Baets, Demol continues, has 'interests' in a few bars in the Aarschotstraat. 'He came to verify whether he might be in the crosshairs.' He did not see it himself, Demol specifies, but his associate Depasse informed him of it. The General Inspectorate questions Depasse, who denies this: he can't remember anything—exit Demol.

One doesn't have to be very clever to know what prompted Demol to come and do his bit for the Pignolet dossier. He was removed from his position as police commissioner after it was revealed that he had lied to the Schaerbeek City Council about his alleged membership in the far-right terrorist organisation Front de la Jeunesse in the early 1980s. The evidence, a stack of registration forms of the far-right terrorist organisation, was found during a house search in 1989 by detectives from the De Baets team.

Almost simultaneously with Johan Demol, the former Brussels BOB officer Alain Pirard also reported to Pignolet at the end of January 1998. He is a former subordinate of De Baets at the 3KOS and wants to tell a story about another search: in May 1990, in the castle Maizeret of Baron Benoît de Bonvoisin in Andenne. The intention was to search there for administrative documents related to the Cidep fraud case, but according to Pirard - who was there himself - De Baets went way beyond that. During the briefing, he asked his team to 'make every effort' to search for the Galopin file.

Allow us to interject some Belgian history at this point. During World War II, the Belgian government fled to London. To boost economic initiatives in Belgium, King Leopold III called on Alexandre Galopin, the governor of the Société Générale de Belgique. A few months before the Allies landed in Normandy, tradition has it, Galopin came into possession of a list of Belgian industrialists who had actively collaborated with the

Germans. On February 28, 1944, Alexandre Galopin was murdered. The perpetrators were never found, but a myth was born. Benoît de Bonvoisin is Alexandre Galopin's grandson. When he got into trouble with the justice department in the 1980s, it quickly gave rise to heated debates - especially in the French-speaking part of the country. According to some, Galopin was murdered by the Resistance; according to others, by German collaborators. According to one, Galopin's "list" still exists today, and de Bonvoisin has been using it to blackmail the Belgian establishment for years. According to the other, the 'campaign' against de Bonvoisin results from failed attempts to blackmail people. De Baets says ex-BOB officer Alain Pirard now wanted his men to search for the list during the search.

'What are you implying?' responded De Baets when investigating judge Pignolet confronted him with Pirard's allegations in early 1998. As far as De Baets could remember, he was not involved in the search of de Bonvoisin's home. His colleague Michel De Visscher led the search and gave the briefing. Affirmative, says De Visscher when it is his turn for interrogation by Pignolet. Galopin's list? I heard of it but never looked for it. Exit Alain Pirard. Or not quite. Pirard has another great story. De Baets' father was a collaborator during the war, and his son has a business interest in bars in the Aarschotstraat. Later, it turned out that Pirard was a former schoolmate of... Johan Demol.

Benoît de Bonvoisin himself also stuck his nose in the Pignolet case. For many years, the Baron intervened in every legal investigation in which he believed he could gain knowledge or influence. It was no different in the Dutroux case. The Belgian public had barely recovered from the shock of the discovery of the bodies of Julie and Melissa when prosecutor Bourlet received a phone call from de Bonvoisin. He had just attended a meeting with the leads of the investigative team. 'But certainly, Mister Baron,' they heard him answer politely. Astonished, they watched as Bourlet cleared his schedule for the day and closed the conversation with: 'See you tomorrow.' Bourlet hung up the phone with a wide grin. 'That was Baron de Bonvoisin.' His clerk reminded him that he was supposed to go to Liege to attend a meeting with Attorney General Anne Thily the following day. 'I know,' Bourlet laughed.

On December 6 1997, de Bonvoisin went to Pignolet to tell his story about De Baets, the search and 'the list'. Newspaper reports later suggest that the magistrate wants to solve 'via the X1 case' the murder of Alexandre Galopin - even though it has been statute-barred since at least 1964.*4 There are so many witness accounts, independent of each other, that Pignolet reckoned: where there is smoke, there is fire. De Bonvoisin also believed he could affirm that De Baets' father was the guilty party during WWII and was even convicted for it. Perhaps he was the murderer of Galopin. That would explain everything. Pignolet went searching for information about De Baets senior. The result was disappointing. The late Jozef De Baets was frequently decorated as a resistance fighter after the war. For a moment, there is hope when it appears, as de Bonvoisin claims, that Jozef De Baets was once the subject of an investigation by the military tribunal. The hope is short-lived. Jozef De Baets, as a soldier, accidentally drove a truck into a store window in 1949. He was sentenced to a fine of 100 francs. Exit de Bonvoisin.

The next in the line is André Moyen. Like de Bonvoisin, he lives in Andenne. The elderly Moyen was once, very briefly, a famous Belgian for his statements about the so-called stay-behind Operation Gladio network, a secret ultra-right-wing group of weapons fanatics whose goal was to form a resistance group should the Soviet Union have invaded Western Europe. The revelation of the existence of Gladio and related networks caused a great stir in Western Europe in the late 1980s. Moyen has been making a living as a security consultant for years and often works for his good friend Benoît de Bonvoisin.

In mid-October 1997, Moyen sent a 'secret report' on adjutant De Baets to Pignolet. The latter immediately added it to his file. It is not clear whether Moyen, as a detective, had himself been digging into the private life of De Baets or someone else. What is certain is that this was the source from which Demol, Mahieu, de Bonvoisin and Pirard drew their inspiration. A few years earlier, Moyen was also suspected of having shadowed the investigating judge Van Espen when he went to France with a rogatory commission to conduct searches in the Cidep affair... Exit Moyen. Exit Mahieu, too, meanwhile.

It appeared that Pignolet had a hypothesis. A few months before the Dutroux case, the gendarmerie brass, much to the anger of Adjutant De Baets, agreed to the so-called consensus note. With this, the government introduced a clear distinction between the tasks and powers of the BOB and the Judiciary Police. For De Baets, this meant that his life's work would go up in smoke. Pignolet believes that by creating a mammoth investigation out of nothing, based on the Dutroux case, into alleged paedophile high-ranking figures, De Baets tried to secure his position within the police force. In the wings of the Brussels law courts, there were whispers of a "twenty-fourth brigade", a super police force with people from both Judiciary Police and BOB, who would mainly deal with cases such as that of X1. The entire story about this so-called twenty-fourth brigade was pure fiction, which makes no difference to Pignolet. He suspects that De Baets, in one way or another, would still be able to obtain a pretext for searching the homes of prominent figures and thus for looking again for "the list" of Galopin or other state secrets. In his eyes, De Baets was acting very cunningly to such an extent, even in Neufchâteau, that he called in some actors: the X-witnesses.

In mid-1998, victimologist Carine Hutsebaut received a visit from Adjudant Etienne Goossens. 'I had to cheer that man up for hours,' she says. He said he was sick and tired of wasting time on this farce. I felt sorry for him. He said they want to make me "get" someone, and all they give me is total rubbish. Etienne Goossens was the officer Pignolet charged with most interrogations in his 231/97 file.

The first trail that Pignolet had adjutant Goossens work on is handed to him by his colleague Van Espen and looks spectacular. Too good to be true, almost. Van Espen told Pignolet that it had come to his attention that Regina Louf had acted several times in 1989 in a role-play for young gendarmerie recruits.*5 Add this to the knowledge that witness X2 and BOB officer Michel Clippe already knew each other before the X-dossiers started and the mystery seemed solved. De Baets needed someone who had some experience in 'playing' the victim of sexual abuse and didn't look too far. Goossens even had to verify whether a list of women who had

participated in such role plays existed and, if so, to investigate "whether investigators at Neufchâteau had laid eyes on such list in 1996."*6 Pignolet lived in the hope that he would have found every name of the X-witnesses.*7 Later, the newspaper De Standaard carried this story on its front page. 'X1 repeatedly played the role of the raped woman in a role-play in the gendarmerie school from 1989 to 1990,' it says. At the end of the article: 'It is extraordinary that the woman in 1989 during her performance in the gendarmerie school did not say a word about what she knew about the murders of Christine Van Hees or Carine Dellaert.'

More than a month before this appeared, Adjutant Goossens had already gone to investigate. On December 4, he communicated his findings to Pignolet. They make his suspicion collapse like a house of cards. At the time, no fewer than four women were enrolled in these "interrogation techniques" courses, Goossens can report. These courses were organised on the initiative of State Secretary for Social Emancipation Miet Smet and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBO) of the gendarmerie. All four women were volunteers at the non-profit organisation Against Her Wil. The roots of Regina Louf could not be more respectable. The non-profit organisation's founders saw their pioneering work rewarded with academic or government positions and enjoyed a certain reputation in the Flemish women's movement.

At the CBO, Chief Warrant Officer Paul Laforce had taken on the project. Laforce is a teacher in the School of Chartered NCOs and was tasked with teaching aspiring chiefs of police how to respond to a woman who reports a rape. Paul Laforce remembers this: 'Regina Louf was here only once. Since there was no budget to pay her, I reimbursed her for her travel expenses and a sandwich I bought her for lunch. Danny Durinck and I decided not to take Regina Louf back after that one-day session because we thought she was too unstable. By this, I mean she was too emotionally involved in her roles.*8 Laforce's colleague is also questioned. Danny Durinck states: 'After that, we did not call on Louf any more, given her appearance, her peculiar attitude towards the gendarmerie and the fact that we had the impression that she was not

playing a role, but was apparently drawing from her own experience.*9

During the 1990 school year, it is Anne Kesteloot who is sent out from THW to play the role of a rape victim. Today, Anne Kesteloot is the provincial coordinator of the Physical and Sexual Violence against Women project in East Flanders. Kesteloot remembers Regina Louf very well. In 1989, she came to THW for help and felt so much at home that she volunteered to do some administrative work for the non-profit organisation. The core of her story at the time was the same, says Anne Kesteloot. Recurrent sexual abuse at a young age, prostituted by her pimp (...). The experiences she had put into the book were horrifying. You rarely come across such detailed accounts of abuse.' According to Anne Kesteloot, there was nothing abnormal about Regina Louf's decision to want to help others. She regarded her as a typical example of a victim who dealt with her past in a very extroverted way. She remembers her as rather forgetful. You could have an extensive conversation with her and make practical arrangements. She didn't remember a thing if you asked her about it later. As if you were talking to another of her alter egos.'*10

Attempts by Adjudant Goossens to make Pignolet understand that he is chasing shadows are unsuccessful. Goossens was ordered to verify whether De Baets had been present on December 15 1989, during Louf's performance at the gendarmerie school. The result is negative. Goossens had even to check whether De Baets might be her biological father, whether he might not have been at school with her, or have worked in a bar where De Baets had to carry out police inspections when he was still a rookie cop, or where he might have had 'interests'. Goossens' thorough search comes up with nothing. He performs another asset check on De Baets and his current life companion. He searches all the bars in the Aarschotstraat in Brussels. There is no trace of De Baets or possible frontmen. Nothing at all.

Goossens also had to look into two drinking establishments brought to his attention by witnesses of the Demol, Pirard and Moyen battle: the Saint-Christophe in Nevele or thereabouts

and Bar Tropicana, wherever that may be. De Baets would own one bar; the other would be one where Regina Louf still worked. Goossens and his colleagues search as far as they can. There has never been a bar with the name Saint Christophe in Nevele, its surroundings, or anything resembling it. They found the Tropicana, however, and Goossens can even confirm that Regina Louf worked there. However, before Pignolet can start a victory lap, Goossens must point out a small detail to him. Tropicana is not a bar; it's... a club of aquarium owners. The following -as confirmed to the authors- has been added in all seriousness as an official piece of the 231/97 file of investigating Judge Pignolet:

Do you know the posthorn snail? In some aquariums, I see it gliding along stately: an immense snail that could pass for a well-fed Escargot de Bourgogne. I get the creeps from such a snail, especially since my aquarium is not that large, and I have no desire to keep snails that take up the entire front window. I wanted lovely little snails of an acceptable size that left my plants alone, chewed up the bottom and kept my windows unused. So I was demanding on the snail issue, but when my eye fell on the *Melanoides tuberculatus*, a little turret-shaped snail, I knew this was the snail I was looking for. So I put two in my aquarium and then forgot they existed (...).

The text dates from March 1989 and was written by Regina Louf, then 20, for the club magazine of the non-profit organisation Tropicana. Once he had discovered that Tropicana was not the name of a brothel, Pignolet analysed about five of these columns, perhaps hoping to find a hidden key somewhere. That trail, too, has, as might have been feared, come to a dead end.

When De Standaard newspaper published the story about the gendarmerie school on January 10, 1998, it raised the question of why this woman did not come out with her story back then. However, in 1988 and '89, the club magazine of the non-profit organisation Tropicana sometimes contained highly relevant information. Thus, we find in another edition of this piece: 'We are very pleased that our members are increasingly inclined to write articles for our magazine. After our friend Eric Van Poucke, Regina Louf has now joined our ranks.'*11

Eric Van Poucke is captain-commander at the General Staff of the gendarmerie. And what did this senior officer say when Adjutant Etienne Goossens knocked on his door? 'Knowing that I was a gendarme, she told me at the time that she collaborated with the association THW and that in that context, she had participated in role plays as a victim of rape in the gendarmerie school. When I asked her how she had ended up there, she replied that she had been abused as a child. I found it strange that her father was a member of the same club since I had interpreted "abused as a child" as being a victim of incest.'*12

Commander Van Poucke must admit that he never considered it worthwhile to report this case of child abuse to the public prosecutor. Pignolet did not allow himself to be thrown off balance and continued investigating. He used the telephone taps on Regina Louf's private line, commissioned research on Tania V, and interviewed his colleague Jean-Marc Connerotte. He wanted to know if the first telephone call between Tania V and X1 could have been a "set-up." Connerotte also had to disappoint him.

At the beginning of the 231/97 case, Laurence De Koninck, an ex-punk and gendarme with the Anderlecht brigade, also made some statements. As a student in 1989, De Koninck personally knew some of the punk suspects in the Van Hees case. When she learned in March 1997 that Neufchâteau had taken a new interest in the case, she wanted to publish her version. She ends up at the Neufchâteau antenna and gets Bille on the phone. Bille and De Koninck have a brief conversation. She says she remembers what the perpetrator identified by other punks looked like. She mentioned his name in a statement to the Ganshoren gendarmerie in 1990. Bille looks in the old file, nothing from it can be found. Can't Bille ask for that statement?

From that moment on, there are two versions of the story. According to examining magistrate Van Espen, Bille concealed this information because he did not want attention diverted from the X1 trail. Bille maintained that he had indeed contacted the Ganshoren brigade by fax.*13 Pignolet began a mammoth investigation to prove that Bille was lying. He had

more than 60 people questioned, including 49 gendarmes of the Ganshoren brigade. They all state under oath that they never received a phone call from Bille and that no fax arrived. At the antenna-Neufchâteau, Duterme's supporters declare that they searched everywhere but that the fax was not found and, therefore, never existed. Just before Pignolet wanted to charge Bille, the latter begged for a verification, via Belgacom, of the documents sent from the fax machine of the antenna at Neufchâteau in April 1997. And then: miracle. The fax was indeed sent. A second miracle: the BOB of Ganshoren found the fax machine.

A third miracle is that the original fax was discovered at the Neufchâteau antenna. It was in a box where Danny De Pauw had written "Rubbish" with a big marker. You are dealing here with the specialists of psychological warfare,' says a Brussels BOB man. 'They know better than anyone how to turn such a stupid piece of paper into a case that can cost a gendarme his head.' Sixty interrogations. That is more than were conducted in the same period in the files of Van Hees, Dellaert, De Cuyper and Mazibas combined.

In July 1998, Pignolet gave in. His file 231/97 has taken the form of a portfolio containing nothing but nonsense. Advice on how to clean your aquarium with snails, weighty theories on the murder of Alexandre Galopin, decorations by Jozef De Baets, a kilo of paper with statements from people who deny the existence of an existing fax, a report attached to another report that says it does not exist... Bille and De Baets were given access to their dossier by Pignolet and were allowed to copy it at their own expense, 30,000 francs. Although the press has frequently claimed otherwise, they have not been accused of anything. Of the numerous suspicions about manipulations in the X1 investigation, no proof has been provided. Everything rests, still today, on four false reports of rereading.

In early 1999, Adjutant Goossens was sent on his way. He had not done his job correctly, so it is said. It is now becoming sheer nonsense. At the General Inspectorate, the investigation is handled by a colonel. This gives an idea of how much the top of the gendarmerie regards this case as a top priority. This is not just any colonel, by the way. The new chef d'enquête is

Hubert Fransen, brother of Herman Fransen, the current lieutenant general of the gendarmerie. A search is now being conducted at the home of Tania V; a trail is being followed to relatives of victims of the Gang of Nivelles, and helicopters are being used to take aerial photographs of a villa that may have played a role in the so-called De Baets- X1 conspiracy. The cost of the Pignolet investigation begins to approach that of the X1 investigation by mid-1999. But there is a difference: Pignolet has still not discovered anything.

Bille and De Baets are so overwhelmed by what they find in the Pignolet file that they can no longer contain themselves. They tell their story on radio and television. It is only a matter of weeks before Pignolet charges them for... breach of professional secrecy. This happens in dossier 174/98. Pignolet opened this dossier after PS MP Claude Eerdeken presented himself in his cabinet on September 10, 1998. Eerdeken told a story about a meeting with Bille and De Baets in October 1997 at the home of Pascal Vrebos, the moderator of the Sunday debate program Controversy on RTL-TV. PS MP Patrick Moriau was also present there. 'De Baets and Bille had their dossier before them,' says Eerdeken. 'I remember it. It concerned a series of testimonies and interrogations of various witnesses, official reports, and a classic repressive dossier. I could have taken note of it.'*14

Claude Eerdeken is a man of many faces. In Flanders, he is best known for his outburst during a plenary chamber debate that Wallonia might better join France. He is also the author of a bill to restrict the subsidies of undemocratic political parties. In the Pignolet dossier, he is in league with Vlaams Blok leader Johan De Mol and the extreme-right Baron Benoît de Bonvoisin. Bonvoisin's castle is in Andenne, where Eerdeken is mayor.

At the end of the 1980s, Eerdeken unleashed stupefaction within and outside his party by suddenly declaring out loud that de Bonvoisin was his friend and that he had been the subject of a "smear campaign" for years. The French-language investigative journalists Philippe Brewaeys and Jean-Frédéric Deliège reconstructed the story. They found that Eerdeken had allowed himself to be tricked by de Bonvoisin in 1982 in a ridiculous way and that he later made a visible effort in the

parliamentary committee of inquiry on Banditism and Terrorism to reject as irrelevant all traces that might lead to his friend. *15 Curiously, these are the same two journalists who, six years later, extol Eerdeken as the great hero who dared to speak the 'truth' about the X files. The Verwilghen Commission, so it is his intimate conviction, has allowed itself to be manipulated for months by people like this and to be propelled in the direction of 'protected folk' that exists only in fantasy. The interview with Eerdeken, published by Brewaeys and Deliège in the weekly *Le Soir Illustré*, is the direct occasion for the indictment of Bille and De Baets.

It seems like one big show. In June 1999, Pignolet quietly closed his 231/97 file. De Baets and Bille went utterly unpunished. A few months later, the same thing happened with the Eerdeken dossier. As Patrick Moriau formally states from the first day, he has made up his whole story. At one point, it was claimed about Eerdeken that he must have known Michel Nihoul and his companion Casper Flier. Eerdeken reacted furiously to these reports and said he did not know Nihoul at all. Michel Nihoul himself thinks otherwise and reminds Eerdeken in his book of the discussions that he and Flier had in 1984 about a plan to take over the paper company Intermills in Andenne: "The discussion about the takeover had to be held with the trustees, as well as with the Walloon Region and the mayor of Andenne, Claude Eerdeken. Mr Eerdeken declared to the media that he did not know me - which makes me doubt his memory- and that it would be an insult to know me. I will not claim the same of him..."*16

Eerdeken, dossier 231/97, Pignolet, X1, De Baets, investigation of the investigation... After three years of the Dutroux case, no one in Belgium is losing any sleep over it any more. The judiciary occasionally succeeds in shocking public opinion by chasing journalists. The number of proceedings and convictions in the Dutroux case is gradually increasing. At the end of 1998, it was revealed that an army of police had been formed in Liège under the leadership of Joachim, Counsel at the Court of Appeal. This cell is exclusively dedicated to the search for leaks in the investigations handled by the public prosecutor of Neufchâteau. The cell, set up at the request of Attorney General Anne Thily, clearly targets Attorney General

Michel Bourlet and his investigators. For every telephone call they make, they have to make a report. The telephone lines of Prosecutor Bourlet are checked.

The sense of disdain for anyone who dares to criticise the course of the Dutroux investigation is sometimes uncanny. It reaches its climax with the sudden decision to have the autopsy reports of Julie, Melissa, An, and Eefje 'reread'. The intention, apparently, is to imbue public opinion with the notion that when a girl's corpse's vaginal opening is 15 centimetres, there are reasons to believe that it came naturally.

NOTES:

1. Phone call with Albert Mahieu, December 26, 1997.
2. Albert Mahieu and Johan Demol recently took seats in the Brussels Capital Council. One was elected to the Vivant list, and the other was added to the Vlaams Blok list.
3. This should not come as a surprise. Long before Demol was unmasked as a former member of the Front de la Jeunesse, significant questions arose in Brussels legal circles about how he had violent raids carried out in the Schaerbeek migrant neighbourhoods in the light of TV cameras.
4. Père-Ubu, April 2, 1998 and La Dernière Heure, April 4, 1998.
5. Van Espen learns this thanks to a spontaneous statement by her friend Tania V when the antenna-Neufchâteau questions her: Brussels BOB, October 29, 1997, PV 152.588.
6. Cantonment of investigating judge Jacques Pignolet before the General Inspectorate of the gendarmerie, Brussels, November 13 1997.
7. 'X1 taught the gendarmerie the trade', De Standaard January 10 1998.
8. Interrogation of Chief of Police Paul Laforce, General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, December 1, 1997, PV 100.091, appendix A.
9. Interrogation of First Chief Constable Danny Durinck, General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, December 4, 1997, PV 100.091, appendix B.
10. De Standaard 27 January 1998.
11. Club magazine Tropicana, October 1988.

12. Interview of Erik Van Poucke, General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, January 28, 1998, PV 100.021.
13. Bille also says that during a meeting in Bastogne, he talked with Van Espen about the tip of De Koninck.
14. Quotes from an interview with Claude Eerdeken in Le Soir Illustré, October 21, 1998.
15. De Bonvoisin et Cie, Philippe Brewaeys and Jean-Frédéric Delière, Epo, 1992. The extremely curious passage on Eerdeken appears on pages 165 to 167.
16. Michel Nihoul, Rumors and Facts, pages 125-126.

Final Considerations

We are not right.

June 5, 1998. Witness W05 reported to the Brussels BOB. In PV 106.707, we read that this umpteenth anonymous witness did not wish to be referred to by the letter X. Her statement specifically mentioned that she did not want to be called a witness, given the current political climate. W05 dished up a story that day about a former gendarme who allegedly leaked the entire Neufchâteau dossier to the editorial offices of the respectively Flemish and French newspapers De Morgen and Télé Moustique. A few days later, W05's testimony triggered a large-scale judicial action for which, amongst other outcomes, a 'terrorism cell' was engaged. House searches were carried out. Several people were brought in for questioning. So, too,

were the authors of this book, one of whom -Marie-Jeanne Van Heeswyck- lost her job in the maddening atmosphere of those days. Later, we find out who is the mysterious witness W05. She is a French-speaking journalist—a colleague.

We are the journalists who, in early 1998, were the first to bring attention to the so-called 'side dossiers' of Neufchâteau. This did not go down too well for us. People with whom we used to deal in a friendly manner have since regarded us as professional pariahs. We cannot discount that this work could give rise to public pleas for reintroducing censorship and book burning in exceptional cases. Rarely has a letter aroused so much aggression as the letter "X". Just the other day, a French-language weekly used the term "criminals" to describe people criticising the work of examining magistrate Jacques Langlois in Neufchâteau. Once again, we suspect that this was about us. There are reasons to believe that W05 considered her unconventional intervention of betraying colleagues in court a reasonable act of civil duty.

We have long wondered how a difference of opinion about something as simple as a set of observable facts - which is what the entire Dutroux case is - can lead to so much uproar. A conspiracy theory must be the root cause. Anyone who dares to take testimonies such as those of X1 seriously, it is said, immediately commits himself to the assumption that Belgium is the country of the Great Conspiracy. History taught us some valuable lessons about conspiracy theories. Once, the myth of a grand Jewish economic conspiracy was the precursor of genocide. The phenomenon has already emerged in countless equally dangerous variants, such as the contemporary fable about how a global power grab is being planned from Arab quarters.

But this is our problem. We are not right. There is no "right" that we aspire to claim or wish to defend. And we do not feel at all at home in the circle of people keen on leaving out the letter d from the word 'democracy'. We want to give the judiciary the confidence that we owe it as Belgian citizens, but we can only hope that the subject of this book, which concerns us deeply, proves to be the exception and not the norm.

Perhaps we should first shout it loud and clear from the rooftops. Despite the realisation that this will do little to change the perception of our work, we are happy to do so. We have never believed in the idea of the Great Conspiracy or the proposition of a thoroughly corrupt police and justice system. Even now, after measuring the gigantic damage done in the X1 and similar files, the suspicion of a cover-up planned from on high remains for us only the last of the hypotheses.

What we believe in is corporatism. Opportunistic alliances: between the career-minded policeman and the magistrate who sees his colleagues being slaughtered in a parliamentary committee and cannot help thinking: 'Blimey, we also have an unsolved case of a child murder here in our town - if only they don't bring that up'. At the end of 1996, Belgium went through a phase in which the judiciary was branded as a 'caste', and pleas were made to tear down the entire system in one fell swoop. This kind of situation typically leaves its mark. The targeted individuals react with the same shock as, for example, parents of the victims such as Tiny Mast or Paul Marchal, who tried to understand and process the astonishing degree of incompetence with which the investigations were carried out. They developed, logically, an intuitive reflex of rejection of worst-case scenarios and a feeling of immense relief when a police officer came up with a report which discredited the hypothesis that Dutroux and consorts are part of a criminal child trafficking network. This reflex is so deeply ingrained that it immediately creates a hostile environment when someone comments that the questionable report is based only on deductions and misrepresentations of facts.

This is the unedifying story of Belgian history's most talked about criminal case. It is a constant clash of extremes, where opinions on both sides prevail over facts. No, there were no objective magistrates and investigators. Consequently, there was also no everyday observation of facts. Up to now, this analysis has only served to absolve -in a slightly patronising manner- individuals such as Michel Bourlet, Jean-Marc Connerotte and their team of police officers: they allowed themselves to be led by emotions. There had to be a "network". Today, we show that on the opposite end of the spectrum, they operated in a much more zealous and, unfortunately, also in an illegal *modus operandi*. There should and would be no

network. Any methods were sanctioned to prove it - even the most Machiavellian ones. This is what we mean by: 'What Belgium wasn't supposed to know about the Dutroux case.' We have no knowledge of a conspiracy, only of a dogma.

Some elements we just don't understand compel us to hope that we are not dealing with the norm here but with unintentional exceptions. What possessed Brussels investigating judge Jean-Claude Van Espen to take on the investigation against his former network of acquaintances in early 1997? What about Michel Nihoul's associates at the Brussels Judicial Police, who were supposed to produce a fully objective analysis of his role in this tragedy? And what about the gendarmes in Brussels who, in hindsight, turned out to be involved with Nihoul in some shady dealings shortly before the Dutroux case and who preferred to keep their mouths shut? While one police officer organised the deployment of costly equipment to shadow him as discreetly as possible, his bosom friend in the police force was brought in to strengthen the investigation team.

Perhaps we are touching on a taboo again, but so be it. This grotesque game of cronyism appears to us to have a highly unsavoury set of consequences for the rule of law, the victims and the defendants themselves. Even if Michel Nihoul, as many believe -and one can only hope- were to be the subject of the greatest miscarriage of justice of all time, this man will never know peace. Those who wish to do so can continue to shout from the rooftops that Nihoul was 'protected'. The sad thing is that he who suspects a cover-up doesn't even have the lousiest of arguments. This perspective is probably not even due to inner convictions but to a judiciary system that entrusted the investigation to individuals who could not invoke the required level of objectivity. If this argument was about the theft of a handbag, one could bring up the cliché arguments: 'Mistakes happen, Belgium is a small country, a whole bunch of crooks know a bunch of policemen and vice versa.' There's some of that, too. But this is about a case which brought about the most significant public outcry that entire generations of teenagers, twenty-somethings and thirty-somethings will ever know. This was supposed to be a flawless investigation.

We, naive observers, find ourselves in a situation where we can do nothing but quote extensively from testimonies, which can sometimes be particularly damaging for individuals about whom we cannot know with the best of intentions whether they are innocent or not. We had to quote these testimonies - not out of sensationalism, but because it is impossible to show that something was not investigated without first clarifying what should have been investigated in a functional state of law.

We also have the strong feeling that the perpetrators quoted by X1 for, say, the murder of Christine Van Hees sound rather like caricatures - especially if you know that these statements date from those outrageous last months of the extraordinary year 1996. However, we can only conclude that there were objective indications that this woman was telling a story with some very striking and undeniable correlations with the actual events. The Justice Department failed to do its job and, on the contrary, invested an unreasonable amount of time and energy in devising motives for not doing so. The frankly ridiculous 'investigation of the investigation' by Mr Jacques Pignolet took longer - and probably cost more - than the X1 investigation itself. And it has achieved absolutely nothing. The entire public opinion got its message rammed down its throat for months in early 1998: X1 had been 'manipulated' by its interrogators. A year later, it turned out that this proposition was based only on unproven conjecture. The media barely reported on this quite relevant finding of a court that would have been more than happy to prove otherwise. The Justice Department would have made quite significant more headway with a serious investigation into the actions of the main suspects in the Dutroux case in the early 1980s.

This book was released too late. The discussion has long since been closed. Eleven magistrates sat down solemnly side by side at the beginning of 1998 and, in a mood of 'openness' never shown before, declared to the public: the testimonies of the X's, particularly those of X1, amounted to nothing, and were worthless. The investigation purported to have proved this perspective objectively and definitively. The media did the rest. They turned father and mother Louf into celebrities—victims of the most extreme hysteria.

It was also a strange experience for us, reading the statements made by these people in the same period to the Ghent `investigators. Given the atmosphere at the time and the manipulations with which this dossier is filled to the brim, you may assume that things were still euphemistically worded. But it is there, in black and white, signed by those involved. The young Regina Louf was put at the mercy of an ageing macho from Antwerp by her own parents. Meekly, they add: `Yes, she was in love with him.' She was the cause. And by the way, she was already starting to develop breasts. Enough said. Regina Louf was twelve years old at the time.

We thought this was an essential chapter for those eager to form an opinion about X1. However, we still don't know the percentage of truth in her statements. One question has been answered, though: did there exist a family dynamic that allowed this woman to become subjected to such an environment at such a young age? The answer is yes.

This book grew out of a mixture of wonder and a naive sense of duty. The feeling of having disturbed the peace of the nation with a dossier whose final verdict is that it was "fabricated from A to Z" does keep one awake at night. We often think back then to those hectic last days of 1996. D-day was close at hand, or so they said. In Neufchâteau, they got the ball rolling. An entire army of police officers, national magistrates, public prosecutors, experts and professional excavators had been mobilised. As journalists, we whispered rousing trivia to each other with a frown. About how many X's there actually were, and about how many old child murders were on the point of being blamed on `Dutroux, Nihoul and consorts.' That is what we wanted to understand. How could it be that so many people were taking the entire affair so seriously at the time? Was Michel Bourlet a village idiot? The most veteran public prosecutors in the country once focussed with the utmost gravity on the finer points of the X-witnesses and bent over legal twists and turns to bring it all to a successful close.

Today, our country is governed by a liberal-green government of which several members have already proclaimed that the germ of this unique coalition is to be found in the so-called `conversations in room F ' in early 1997. At that time, a group of young politicians reshaped the political landscape. In the

weekly magazine Humo, former CVP chairman Johan Van Hecke later explained why this was bound to happen because of the rumours going around in parliament at the time about what was going on in Neufchâteau. In room F, the police officers wanted to save the kingdom as much as it could still be saved. You could consider it a uniquely Belgian joke: Regina Louf, a preliminary sculptor of the Verhofstadt I government.

The thought that preoccupied us even more, however, was the question of how facts could first appear so convincing and later turn out to be 'made up from A to Z', as the Ghent prosecutor Jean Soenen stated with such conviction. That is what we have tried to understand, always considering the possibility that everything could be traced back to emotionalism. We would have had no problem admitting that we were wrong. We would have finished this book with the same dedication - as a kind of heartfelt apology to everyone who had ever read our articles at the time. But we did want to know where, when and how we had erred. We wanted to sniff out the facts one by one, hold them up to the light, comprehend them and enable us to explain why what seemed white at first turned out to be black afterwards.

It has become a very different book—more technical, more voluminous, and arriving too late. It may be annoying, but we wanted to understand it, at least for ourselves. We now think we have just about reached that point.

We wanted to understand how the man who had grown up in that old mushroom farm at the time was so sure that X1 'must have been there'. We wanted to know what had prompted the Brussels public prosecutor's office to argue the contrary. The evening we spent with him and his wife was a pivotal moment in our search. He was still very much baffled by the situation and begged us not to mention his name. He had a point of view and had seen so much commotion around this story that he wanted nothing more than 'to be kept out of it'. He would try to reconcile himself with the terrible thought that he would never fully comprehend this mystery. We confronted him with the final conclusions of the prosecutor's office and compared them with what he drew for us on the dining table: doors, stairs, corridors, and cellars. X1 had been there, he exclaimed again. Those who thought they knew the opposite were

spouting nonsense. He remains firmly convinced of this. Wasn't he allowed to state his perspective?

It was not the only moment. With a mixture of joy and trepidation, we managed to get our hands on the entirety of the much-discussed reports of rereading, the basis of the debunking of X1's statements. A first reading disgusted us. All that white was sooty black, after all! The arguments of the rereaders were concise, sharp and, above all, relentless. It was impossible to put a finger on it. We had to construct our book around this - whether we liked it or not. And yet. Let's check a fact introduced by the readers. Adjutant De Baets had revealed the age of Christine Van Hees to X1. Wrong: it didn't go like that at all. The first domino had fallen. A small piece of anti-X1 evidence appeared to have been falsified in a not even subtle way. We analysed further and found another error, and another, and another... In the end, practically nothing of the entire set of rereadings turned out to be correct. We stumbled upon elements that we did not think could be possible - such as the questionable perspective of the Ghent police officer regarding the fountain in front of the villa, or the so-called alibi of Bernard Weinstein for the murder of Christine Van Hees. The 'evidence' that X1 had never recognised the photograph of Christine Van Hees. The chief re-reader had briefly demonstrated this point by rewriting the texts of the interrogations himself, changing 'no' into 'yes' and adding his own sentences. A detail? No. This is the kind of argumentation that allows anything. This is tantamount to making a citizen confess on paper to a murder that you, as a police officer, are sure he did not commit. If the rule of law allows this, it exposes itself to a danger infinitely greater than the statements from a citizen who publicly expresses reservations about his trust in the justice system.

Nor is it an isolated case. Five months of 'reading' has not produced a single substantiated argument that allows one to conclude with even the slightest degree of certainty that X1 was making things up. One cannot avoid the conclusion that after the dismissal of the De Baets team, information was falsified on a large scale. The findings about the X1-investigations announced with much fanfare in mid-1998 are worthless. That is our decision, and anyone who wants to enter a meaningful debate on the matter will be given access to all the documents on which we base our opinion. There are many.

Without claiming to have complete copies of all the subsidiary files, we are so pretentious as to claim that we know the contents better than anyone else. After all, that was our primary goal.

We are not putting the spotlight on individual magistrates and do not wish to be called out on pretences to assume this role. We can only humbly point it out: a report from State Security shows that Christine Van Hees corresponded with a criminal from the close entourage of Michel Nihoul and Annie Bouty – as pointed out by X1- until shortly before her death. A cross-check of the findings of the 1984 murder dossier against what we know today makes it obvious that Dutroux must have crossed the path of Christine Van Hees in 1984 via a friend from the commercial radio milieu in Brussels. The friend to whom Christine Van Hees spoke about the dangerous environment of sex parties shortly before her death later turned out to have close contact with someone from the Nihoul milieu. The best analysis of the Van Hees file was probably made by that one BOB official: 'We didn't need X1.'

We made even more discoveries. The point of no return could already have been reached in the first days of 1997 in the investigation into the murder of Carine Dellaert. The Ghent magistrates only had to sign a form and release the less than insurmountable sum of 10,000 Belgian francs to get an answer to the critical question: when did Carine Dellaert die? The public prosecutor refused to know the answer and instead threw themselves wholeheartedly into a kind of 'morality investigation', as is usually done only with suspects of crimes - not with witnesses. The investigators from Ghent informed us that they could not find a single former classmate of Carine Dellaert who could recall anything related to sex parties. It took us a mere two phone calls to get in touch with the girl who was once the victim's best friend. She remembered Carine Dellaert's ordeal very clearly. No, she said, she had never been questioned.

Is there anyone who still suffers from sleepless nights anymore? Jurists will argue that these child murders will soon be definitively statute-barred and, therefore, not subject to prosecution if that is not a reassuring thought.

This book is an endpoint for us. If the police force and the magistracy cheat with such appalling ease as it has done here, there is little reason for optimism. Even if dogma has been the most likely motive, that does not detract from the one haunting observation. Belgian justice prefers to create its own realities.

Annemie Bulté,
Douglas De Coninck,
Marie-Jeanne Van Heeswyck

24 September 1999

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